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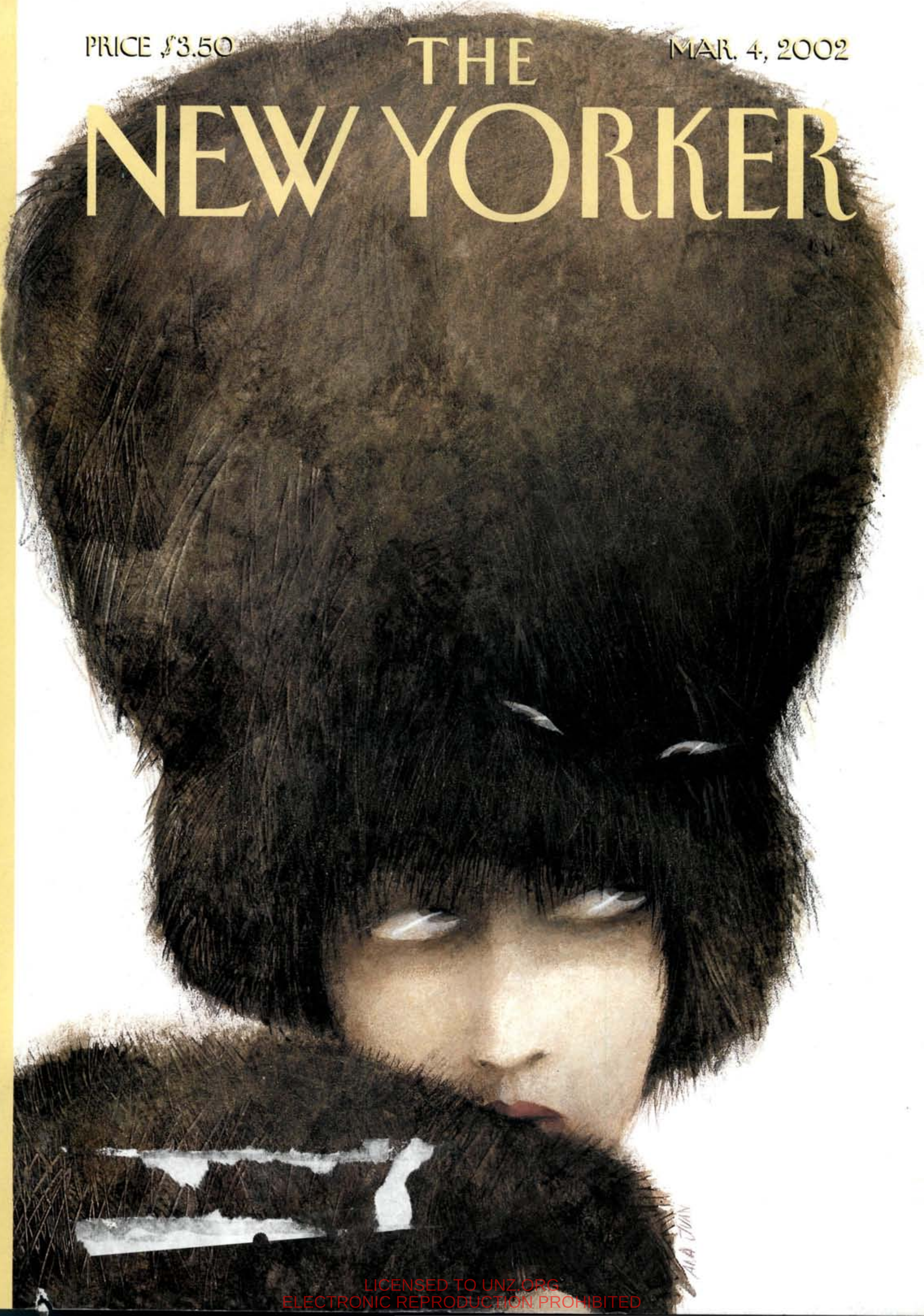

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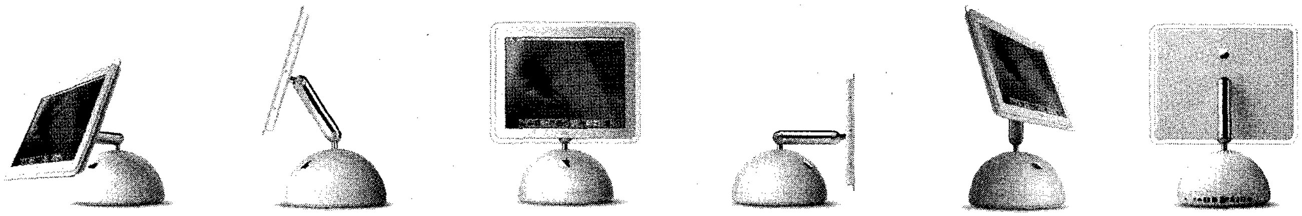

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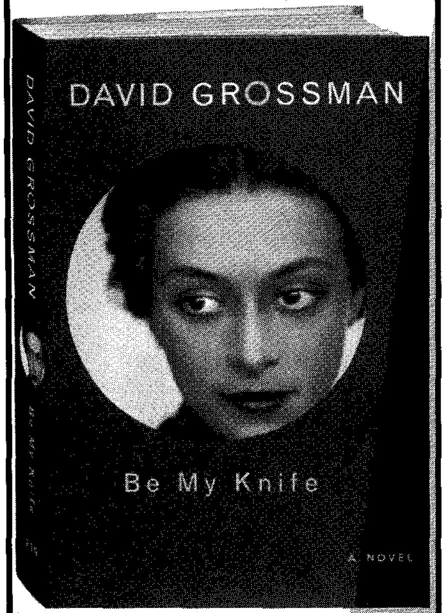

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MARCH 4, 2002

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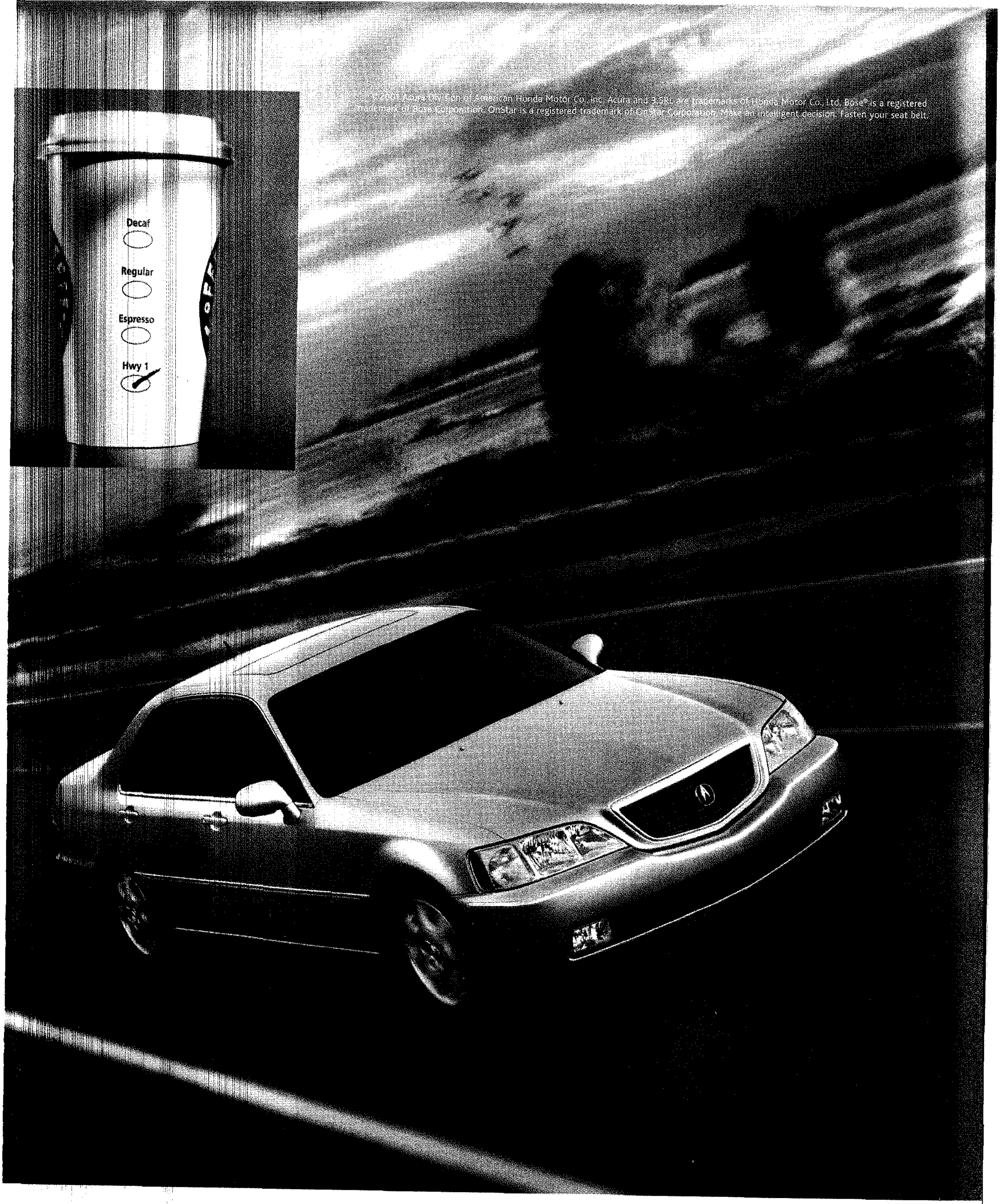

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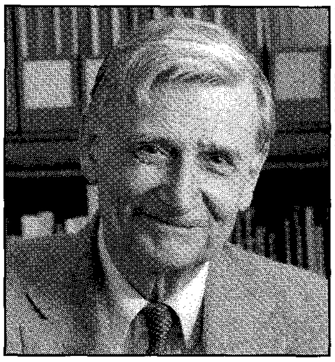

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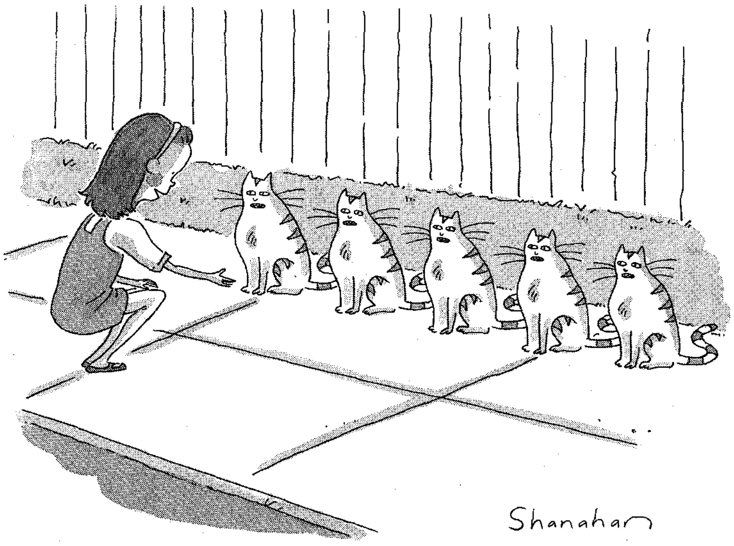

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THE MAIL

DEPT. OF AMPLIFICATION

Reading "The Bondwoman's Narrative By Hannah Crafts, A Fugitive Slave, Recently Escaped From North Carolina"—a handwritten manuscript that may indeed have been the work of a fugitive slave—I and other scholars heard echoes of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, and the conventions of nineteenth-century sentimental and gothic fiction. But now the story grows more interesting. Since I published an account in this magazine of my investigation into the manuscript's authorship ("The Fugitive," February 18th & 25th), a number of readers have pointed out borrowings—occasionally verbatim—from another source: Charles Dickens's "Bleak House."

For example, Crafts's passage beginning "Gloom everywhere Gloom up the Potomac; where it rolls among meadows no longer green" is a reworking of a Dickens passage that opens "Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows." Her borrowing is even more direct in her description of slave quarters. Here's Crafts:

> Is it a stretch of imagination to say that by night they contained a swarm of misery, that crowds of foul existence crawled in out of gaps in walls and boards, or coiled themselves to sleep on ~~nauseous~~ nauseous heaps of straw fetid with human perspiration and where the rain drips in, ~~and the midnight dew imparts some~~ and the damp airs of midnight fatch and carry malignant fevers

And here's Dickens:

> Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As, on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so, these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever.

The copying wasn't mindless, though. As one reader, Professor Deborah H. Roberts, of Haverford College, observes, "Crafts strikingly omits the comparison of the human occupants with vermin or maggots, and makes the night air, not the occupants, the source of infectious disease."

"Bleak House" was published in America in 1852 and 1853, which is consistent with the best guess we had for the composition of Crafts's manuscript, between 1855 and 1861. There were several Dickens novels in the library of the man who may have been her owner. (A Web site in preparation, Bondwomansnarrative.com, will explore Crafts's sources.)

The use of "Bleak House" suggests that Crafts was not merely seeking to "testify" about a slave's experience: she was seeking a relation to a canonical tradition, finding in Dickens a language and rhetoric that she sometimes assimilated and sometimes simply appropriated. No doubt, further study will uncover other instances of influence and borrowing. But the image of a fugitive slave turning to the greatest English novelist of her day—a novelist known for his vivid descriptions of poverty and powerlessness—to help fashion her story carries with it at least one lesson: that the republic of letters has always transcended the bounds of identity.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Cambridge, Mass.

ESCAPE FROM ENRON

Nicholas Lemann questions the Bush Administration's decision not to prop Enron up, at least temporarily, asking, "What's the point of power if it can't be used for a good deed like buying Enron's employees a month to diversify their pension plans?" (The Talk of the Town, January 28th). Has he forgotten that a seller needs a buyer? Would whoever bought shares that month have considered this connivance a "good deed"? We're all sorry for Enron employees, but we shouldn't be asked to take their places.

Norman Shaw
Convent Station, N.J.

•

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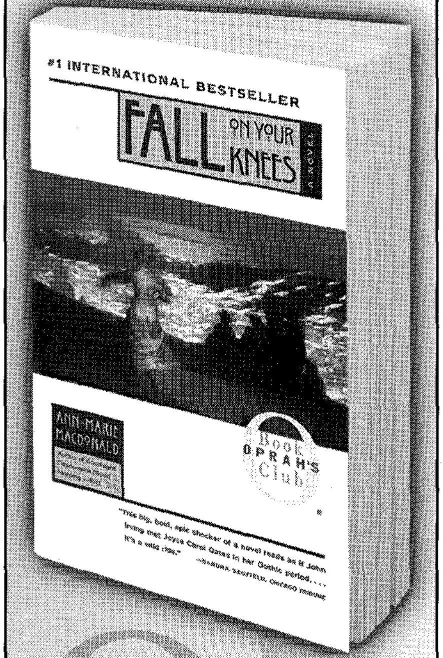

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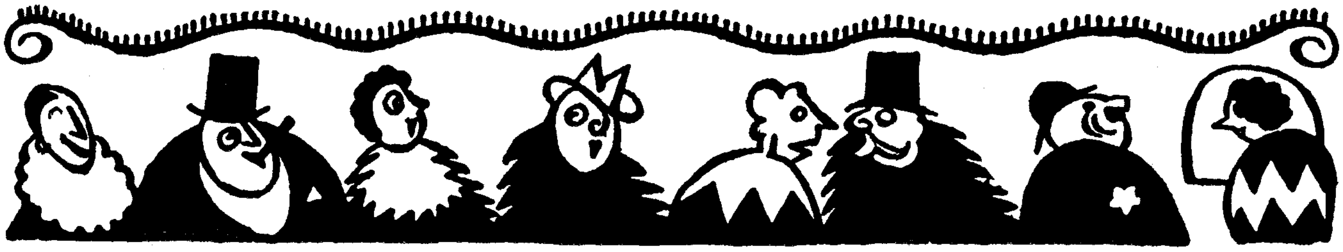

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

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THE CRUCIBLE
A revival of Arthur Miller's 1953 drama, starring Liam Neeson and Laura Linney, under the direction of Richard Eyre. In previews. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

CYMBELINE
Mark Rylance and five other actors take on all (close to thirty) of the roles in Shakespeare's play, in a staging by Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. March 5 at 7:30. Continues through March 17. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

THE DAZZLE
Peter Frechette and Reg Rogers portray the Collyer brothers, in a new play by Richard Greenberg. David Warren is the director. In previews through March 4. Opens March 5 at 7. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

THE GOAT; OR, WHO IS SYLVIA?
Bill Pullman and Mercedes Ruehl star in Edward Albee's new play, in which a celebrated architect must make a confession to his wife and son that will have ruinous effects. David Esbjornson is the director. In previews. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE HAMLET PROJECT
A hip-hop version of Shakespeare's play, by William Electric Black. Feb. 28-March 2 at 8 and March 3 at 2:30 and 8. Continues through March 10. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

HELEN
Tony Kushner directs Johanna Day, Donna Murphy, Denis O'Hare, Phylicia Rashad, and Mary Louise Wilson in Ellen McLaughlin's modern version of the plight of Helen of Troy. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

THE LAST FIVE YEARS
A new musical by Jason Robert Brown ("Parade"), which traces the relationship between a successful young novelist (Norbert Leo Butz) and a struggling actress (Sherie René Scott). Daisy Prince is the director. In previews through the March 3 matinée; opens that evening at 7. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

THE MASTER BUILDER
The Century Center's Ibsen series continues with the playwright's 1892 drama. Previews begin March 5. (111 E. 15th St. 279-4200.)

METAMORPHOSES
Mary Zimmerman's contemporary adaptation of several of Ovid's myths moves to Broadway, having opened at Second Stage last fall. In previews through March 3. Opens March 4 at 7. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

MR. GOLDWYN
Alan King takes the stage to portray the film producer Samuel Goldwyn, in a new play by Marsha Lebby and John Lollos. Gene Saks is the director. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

NECESSARY TARGETS
In Eve Ensler's new drama, a Park Avenue psychiatrist and an ambitious young writer travel to Bosnia to help women refugees deal with their memories of war. Two previews on Feb. 27. Opens Feb. 28 at 7. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

OCCUPANT
Anne Bancroft returns to the stage to portray the painter Louise Nevelson, in a new drama by Edward Albee. Anthony Page is the director. In previews. (Signature, 555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

OKLAHOMA!
Trevor Nunn's West End production of the 1943 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical comes to Broadway. In previews. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

ONE MO' TIME
A revival of Vernel Bagneris's 1979 musical, which is set on a summer night in 1926 in New Orleans at the Lyric Theatre, where such stars as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey once performed. Mr. Bagneris will again star and direct. In previews. (Longacre, 200 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

PRODIGAL
A young man leaves his small Australian home town for the big city, in a musical by Mathew Frank and Dean Bryant. Staged by the York Theatre Company. In previews. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

SURVIVING GRACE
A play by Trish Vradenburg, about a fraught mother-and-daughter relationship. Illeana Douglas and Doris Belack star. Jack Hofsiss is the director. In previews. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-7171.)

THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS
John Lithgow is the gossip columnist J. J. Hunsecker, in a musical version of the 1957 film, with a book by John Guare, music by Marvin Hamlisch, and lyrics by Craig Carnelia. Nicholas Hytner is the director. In previews. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THROW PITCHFORK
A one-man show by Alexander Thomas, in which he explores growing up black in a family with three brothers and an alcoholic father. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AN ALMOST HOLY PICTURE
In Heather McDonald's limpid, well-written monologue, a meditation on the nature of faith, Samuel Gentle (the appealing Kevin Bacon), a lapsed priest turned groundskeeper for the Church of the Holy Comforter, waits, prays, serves, plants his patch, and dutifully tries to live in a sacramental way for a God who seems, if not dead, at least comatose. Following the traditional Romantic trajectory, Samuel, instead of finding comfort in God, manages to find the miraculous in ordinary life. The kinds of questions about darkness and light and revelation that McDonald's play raises can't be found on CNN, which is the evening's asset. But the play's incidents are narrated, not dramatized, and that is its limitation. No amount of outstanding talent—neither Michael Mayer's sensitive direction nor the striking scenic design of Mark Wendland, which turns Samuel's garden into a combination of Beckett's "Happy Days" and Gethsemane—can disguise the fact that we're looking at a talking head. (Reviewed in our issue of 2/18 & 25/02.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

BEA ARTHUR ON BROADWAY: JUST BETWEEN FRIENDS
The stage and screen star performs songs and reminisces about her six-decade career, accompanied by the pianist Billy Goldenberg. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200. Closes March 10.)

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)
Three actors perform thirty-seven plays and a hundred and fifty-four sonnets in under two hours. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

CYMBELINE
Beneath the convolutions of Shakespeare's plot—a motley of folktales and history—there is abundant passion, comedy, and lyricism to be gleaned, and the director Bartlett Sher and his Theatre for a New Audience company have struck it rich. They mine each scene for its dramatic, emotional core, and play up the absurdities as they arise. It's an international Shakespearean smorgasbord, really: scenes of eastern Britain are flavored with theatrical elements of the Far East, and western Britain takes on the drawl of the Wild West, and it's all bound together with the help of song, pantomime, and pageantry. And there are at least three topnotch performances: Boris McGiver as Iachimo, the cunning seducer; Earl Hindman as Belarius, an exiled soldier (cowboy poetry was never thus); and Andrew

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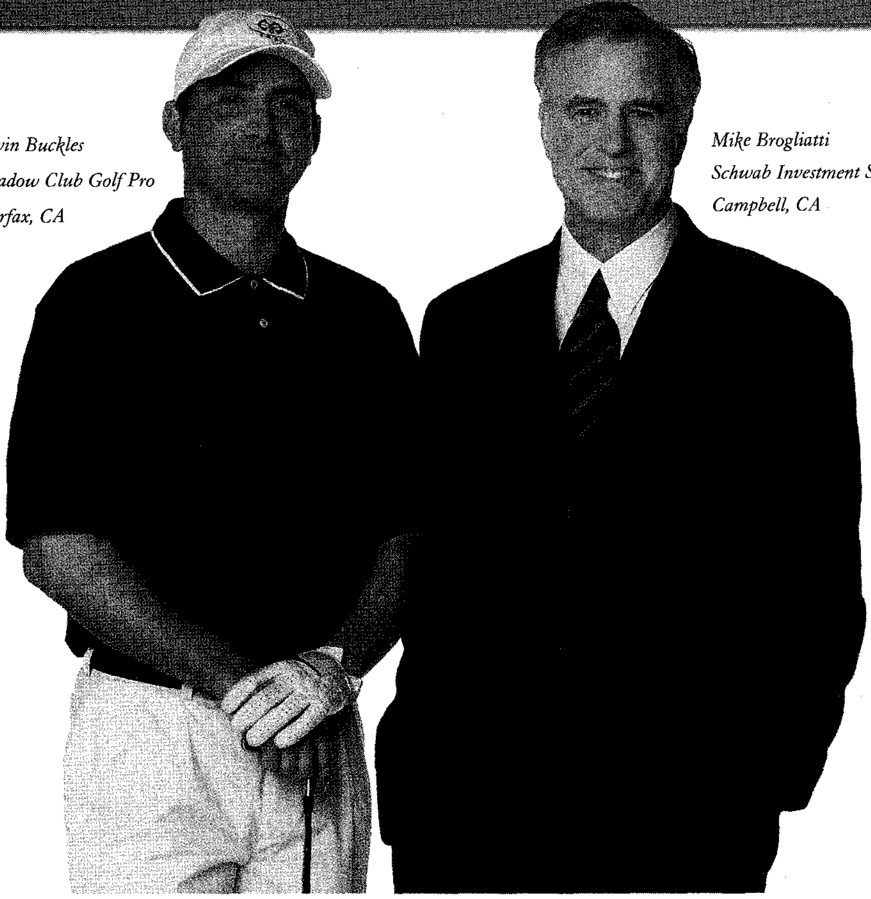

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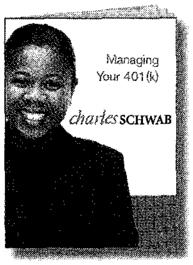

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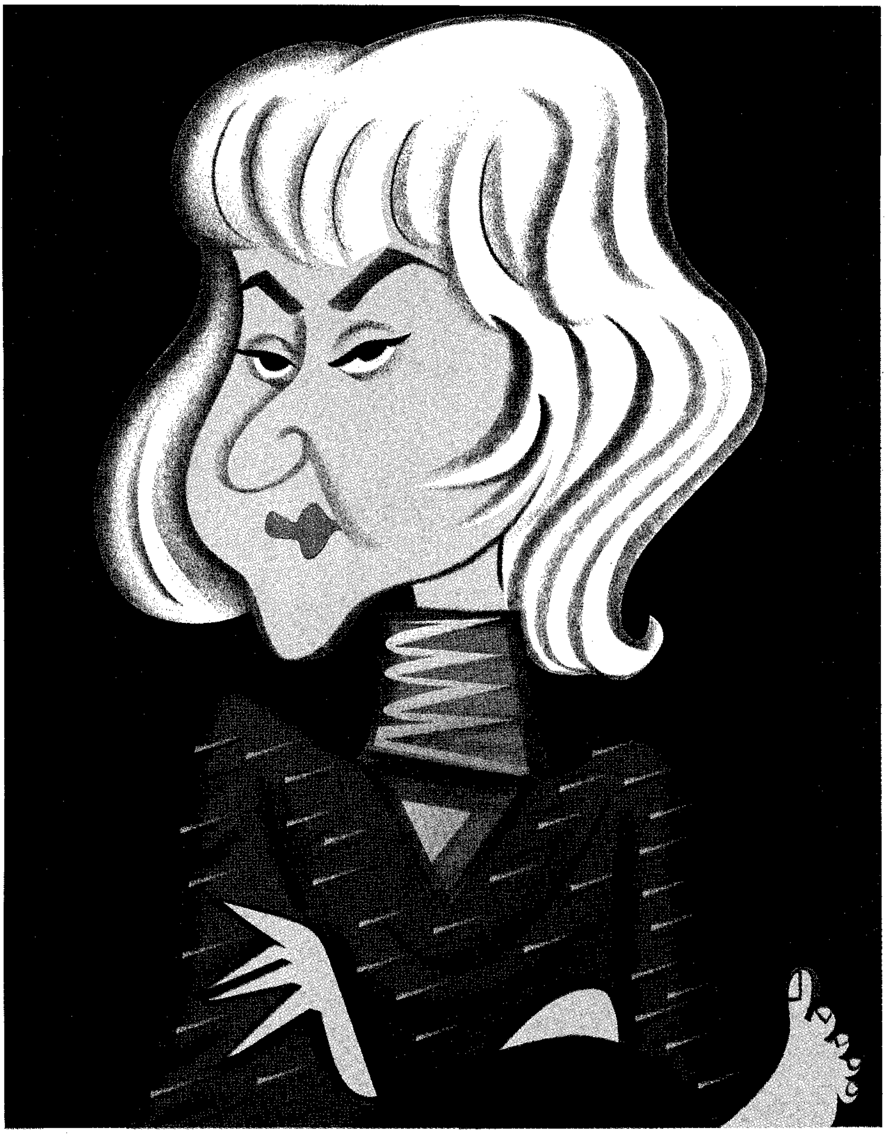
Weems as Cloten, a whiny samurai. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200. Closes March 3.)

DOUBLE AGENCY
Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver, of Split Britches, have paired up with the British troupe the Clod Ensemble on their latest work, which consists of two plays, "Miss Risqué" and "It's a Small House and We've Lived in It Always." Feb. 28-March 2 at 7:30 and March 3 at 2:30 and 7:30. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

DRUMMER WANTED
An encore production of Richard Maxwell's latest play, in which a percussionist, who lives at home with his mother and has recently been hit by a car, ponders the possibility of financial compensation for his injuries. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 239-1105.)



"Bea Arthur on Broadway: Just Between Friends," at the Booth.

ROBERT RISKO

ELAINE STRITCH AT LIBERTY
The Broadway star's hit one-woman show, which ran last fall at the Public Theatre, has transferred to the Neil Simon Theatre. Co-created with the *New Yorker* theatre critic John Lahr and directed by George C. Wolfe. (250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

FINDER'S FEE
A play by Wesley Moore, about a real-estate deal gone bad. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 627-2556. Closes March 3.)

FOOL FOR LOVE
Tim Corcoran's precise, insightful direction is the heart of this revival of Sam Shepard's 1984 play about a misbegotten love whose origins make it all the more powerful. The play is a searing illustration of the extremes we'll go to for the sake of love and the stories we tell ourselves to make it make sense. Mr. Corcoran is particularly good at choreographing the loaded silences and flashes of physical passion that run through one couple's evening-long explication of their history. Though there is unfortunately little chemistry between the two leads, the evening's power lies mainly in the monologues, and those are superb. Steve Payne, as the man who sets the story in motion, creates a compelling mix of loner denial and undeniable charm. (29th Street Rep, 212 W. 29th St. 206-1515.)

FURTHER THAN THE FURTHEST THING
Zinnie Harris's play, which is set partly on the real and remote South Atlantic island of Tristan da Cunha and partly in what the islanders call "the houtside world"—England—takes an imaginative leap into and beyond history. It is 1961, and a volcanic eruption forces the evacuation of all the islanders, wresting them away from their world of black sand and crawfish and penguins and plunging them into factory life and damp employee housing. But the play, which was first produced in London two years ago, is not a romanticization of a paradise lost—there is a tragedy in the island's past, and it still lodges in the lives of an older couple (Robert Hogan and Jenny Sterlin) and the nephew they raised (Dan Futterman). In their relationship to the island and to their current circumstances, they are psychically caught between a rock and a hard place. The cast, under the direction of Neil Pepe, also includes Jennifer Dundas and Peter Gerety. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

GILLETTE
N.F.L. Hall of Fame running back John Riggins portrays a good old boy in his late forties, who moves to Wyoming to make cash working on an oil rig. Written by Will Hauptman. (Storm Theatre, 145 W. 46th St. 800-965-4827. Closes March 2.)

THE GUYS
In Anne Nelson's play, an editor helps a fire chief write eulogies for the funerals of eight of his men killed in the September 11th attacks. Jim Simpson is the director. (The Flea, 41 White St. 226-2407.)

HOMEBODY/KABUL
Tony Kushner's play, set in London and Afghanistan in 1998, concerns the necessity and the dangers of engagement with the world. The first act consists of an hour-long monologue by a middle-aged Englishwoman, memorably brought to life by Linda Emond, who is a lover of old books and lost causes. The character is a fascinating study in both isolation and passion. Her desire to act, to be part of history, leads her to Kabul, where she disappears. In a way, that's when the play disappears, too; it is at its most powerful before it ever leaves home. The subsequent three hours devolve into an unsatisfying tangle of themes and characters, but such is the strength of the first act—and of Emond's performance—that the sense that something important is at stake carries through. The cast of eleven is under the direction of Declan Donnellan. (1/28/02) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)

LAPIS BLUE BLOOD RED
Cathy Caplan's drama about the life of the Italian baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi, based in part on her letters and the court transcripts from the trial of a man accused of raping her and stealing one of her paintings. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. Closes March 3.)

LOVESEATS FOR VIRGINIA WOOLF
Randy Gener's play about Virginia Woolf's friendships draws on diary entries, letters, autobiographical text, and her novels and short stories. (A:D/B Project Space, 116 South Portland Ave., Brooklyn. 718-855-9394.)

MAMMA MIA!
This smorgasbord of song, the brainchild of Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, the male half of the seventies supergroup ABBA, is nothing but hokum—a chucklehead pleasure. Andersson and Ulvaeus have shrewdly allowed their platinum hits to be sent up by Catherine Johnson's book, which is simply a slick cartoon that connects the dots between the band's No. 1 singles. (11/5/01) (Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 563-5544.)

MARIA DEL BOSCO
(SEX & RACING CARS: A SOUND OPERA)
The avant-garde playwright Richard Foreman's fiftieth play. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

THE MATCHMAKER
Anna Manahan and Des Keogh portray twenty different characters, in John B. Keane's play, set in rural western Ireland in the nineteen-fifties. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

NATIVE SON
The Classical Theatre of Harlem presents an adaptation of Richard Wright's novel, written and directed by Christopher McElroen. (Harlem School of the Arts Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave., near 141st St. 539-8828. Closes March 3.)

NOISES OFF
Jeremy Sams's revival of Michael Frayn's 1982 backstage comedy, a farce within an antic farce, is blissful fun. As the dysfunctional troupe of the travelling show "Nothing On," all the members of the excellent cast—Patti LuPone, Peter Gallagher, Richard Easton, Faith Prince, Edward Hibbert, Katie Finneran, T. R. Knight, Thomas McCarthy, and Robin Weigert—shine in roles that lesser comedians would surely find daunting. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

ONE MAN
The British actor Steven Berkoff directs himself in three monologues, two of which he also wrote; the third is an adaptation of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart." Mr. Berkoff is astoundingly versatile in voice and mien. In a piece about the life of an actor he is par-

ticularly incisive and funny—and, in the end, poignant—as he represents everyone from the actor's parents to a series of casting agents to Hamlet. Occasionally Mr. Berkoff is tiresomely self-indulgent, letting himself riff on, say, his own sound effects or his ability to mime climbing stairs for far longer than he should, in a way that doesn't serve the story or the audience. Still, even though he would have been better off with another director, Mr. Berkoff the actor and writer displays a rare, exciting verve. (45 Bleecker Theatre, at 45 Bleecker St. 253-9983. Closes March 10.)

PERMANENT VISITOR
A two-month festival of plays about or by Dawn Powell, or based on her works. (78th Street Theatre, 236 W. 78th St. 206-1515. Closes March 9.)

PUPPETRY OF THE PENIS
It's one thing for a man to develop the ability to stretch his scrotum until it's the size of a dinner plate, but another to share this talent with the world. These two Australians, Simon Morley and David (Friendy) Friend, profess embarrassment at the success of their "little pub show," but it's still a con: fifteen minutes into their act they are utterly naked and out of ideas. They can't go on, but they do. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

QED
Peter Parnell's play, starring Alan Alda as the physicist Richard Feynman, buzzes with life—a fitting quality for a play about a man who was living proof of the idea that "everything is interesting if you look at it deeply enough." Set in 1986—the year of the Challenger explosion, whose causes Feynman helped to investigate—"QED" (the title comes from the theory of quantum electrodynamics, for which Feynman won the Nobel Prize, in 1965) takes us through an afternoon and evening in Feynman's office at Caltech, where he talks about such subjects as photons, drumming, the Manhattan Project, cancer, and "South Pacific." Alda's performance, which makes much use of that scrunchy-eyed smile of his, is one of utter charm. Directed by Gordon Davidson, and also with Kellie Overbey as one of Feynman's students. Sundays and Mondays only. (11/26/01) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

SEXAHOLIX . . . A LOVE STORY
"A little coitus / Never hoit us," John Leguizamo jokes in his third one-man Broadway show, a crowd-pleasing hip-hop account of sexual escapades. Starting with the wacky impoverishment of his Colombian-Puerto Rican upbringing and ending with proud parenthood as the father of two "Jewricans," Leguizamo is noisy, funny, inventive, and sweet. He brings new sounds, new moves, and a new audience to the Great White Way. (He even dances in the aisles.) Next time, though, he'd do well to bring new material, too. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

SORROWS & REJOICINGS
Judith Light, Charlayne Woodard, John Glover, and Marcy Harriell star in a new play by Athol Fugard, set in post-apartheid South Africa. (2/18 & 25/02) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422. Closes March 3.)

TAPE
Having seen the recent movie adaptation starring the marquee actors Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman, and Robert Sean Leonard is no excuse for skipping Stephen Belber's terrific (and here expanded) play about three high-school friends (Dominic Fumusa, Josh Stamberg, and Alison West), who years after graduation find themselves unexpectedly hashing out the aftereffects of a traumatic sexual incident that has haunted each of them in different ways. Belber has expert fun torturing his characters with the things that never get said, yet the language is uniquely telling and the underlying grief shines through. And this Off Broadway production, nicely directed by Geoffrey Nauffts, has one thing in particular that the movie could never claim to have: the funny-sad, love-hate chemistry that endures between two true friends, Fumusa and Stamberg, for whom the play was written; it's something to see. (534 W. 42nd St. 244-7529. Closes March 9.)

TO YOU, THE BIRDIE! (PHÈDRE)
Frances McDormand, Kate Valk, and Willem Dafoe lead the cast in the Wooster Group's latest work, based on Racine's "Phèdre." (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St. Brooklyn. 966-3651.)

URINETOWN
The amount of fun to be had at this musical, by Greg Kotis (book and lyrics) and Mark Hollmann (music and lyrics), is in direct proportion to the unpleasantness of its title. Its central idea is that an evil corporation controls all the toilets in a city that bears some resemblance to New York, but the show is really no more and no less than a terrifically spirited sendup of musicals and their conventions, as self-conscious and gag-happy as a Warner Bros. cartoon (not only does a sign saying "Secret Hideout" hang above a secret hideout; the sign has an arrow on it). (10/1/01) (Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

CONTACT
Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.

42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

THE FULL MONTY
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LOVE, JANIS
Village Theatre, 158 Bleecker St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

PROOF
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

THE SYRINGA TREE
Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.

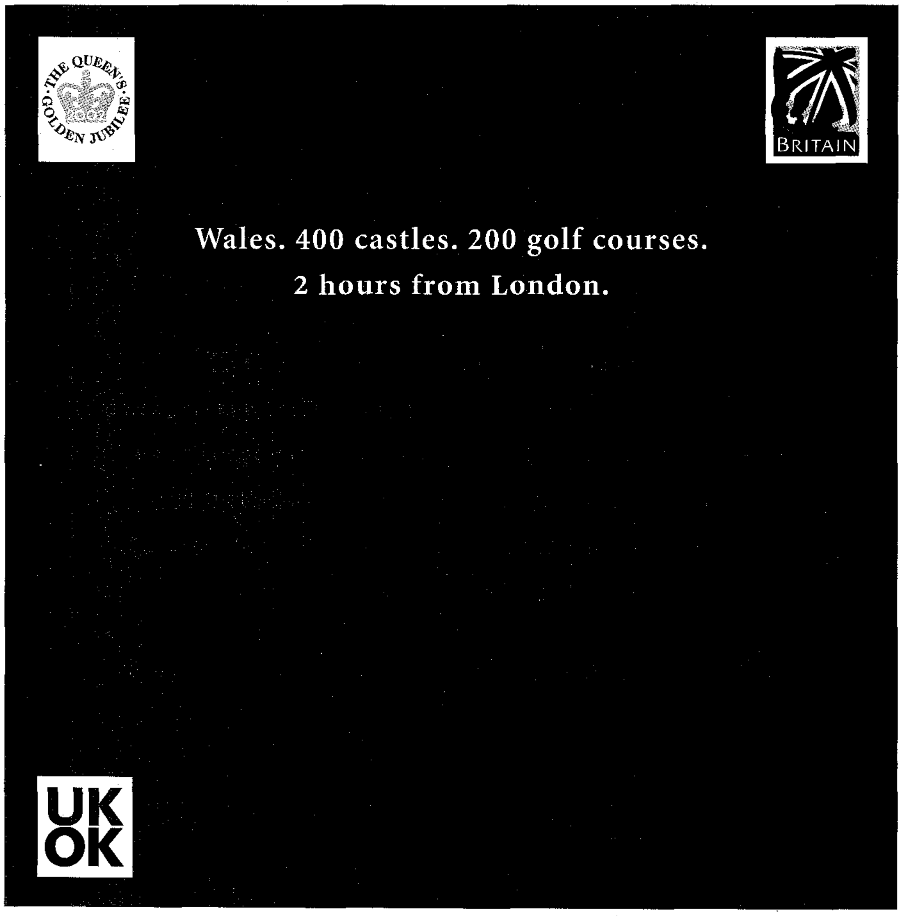
THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
Like many Taylor dances, "Black Tuesday," which débuted last spring at A.B.T., dresses unsettling contemporary truths in period garb and cartoonish style. Dance sketches of Depression-era miseries, performed to Tin Pan Alley classics like "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" and "The Boulevard of Broken Dreams," start small and comic and then, in a move typical of Taylor's genius for the unexpected twist, roll past their likely end toward dangers they do not resolve. The season also features the new "Antique Valentine"; "Cloven Kingdom," a savage satire on social manners, from 1976; and the ardent, baroque "Arden Court," from 1981. Feb. 26 at 7:30: "Piazzolla Caldera," "Aureole," and "Black Tuesday." ♦ Feb. 27 at 8 and March 2 at 2: "Dandelion Wine," "Antique Valentine," and "Speaking in Tongues." ♦ Feb. 28 and March 2 at 8 and March 3 at 3: "Arden Court," "Counterswarm," and "Black Tuesday." ♦ March 1 at 8 and March 3 at 7:30: "The Sorcerer's Sofa," "White Roses Duet,"


THE QUEEN'S GOLDEN JUBILEE

BRITAIN

Wales. 400 castles. 200 golf courses.
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UK OK

“The Word,” and “Cloven Kingdom.” (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through March 10.)

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP
The Brooklyn-based company crosses the street to present new and repertory works. Morris dances in one première, “Foursome,” set to the music of Erik Satie and Johann Nepomuk Hummel. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Feb. 25 and Feb. 27-March 2 at 7:30 and March 3 at 3.)

TRINITY IRISH DANCE COMPANY
The company presents new works of Irish step dancing, including “Jump, Jive, and Jig,” choreographed by the former Bill T. Jones dancer (by way of “Stomp”) Sean Curran. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Feb. 26 at 7:30, Feb. 27-March 1 at 8, March 2 at 2 and 8, and March 3 at 2 and 7:30.)

CHAMECKI LERNER
The Brazilian choreographic duo Rosane Chamecki and Andrea Lerner present “Hidden Form” and “Antonio Caido.” (92nd Street Y Harkeness Dance Project at the Duke, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Feb. 27-28 and March 2 at 8 and March 3 at 2 and 7.)

NEW YORK BAROQUE DANCE COMPANY
Catherine Turocy, the director of the New York Baroque Dance Company, says that at eighteenth-century costume balls “all the usual rules about who you could speak to, who you could look at, and who you could dance with were suspended.” An etiquette of risk and intrigue took over: you said yes with a touch of your fan to your cheek, and a touch of the forehead meant “You must be out of your mind!” By spreading the fan out like a platter, you made it known that you were offering your heart. The company’s twenty-fifth-anniversary show starts at the ball—with lessons for us in the pavane, sniffing snuff, and seducing with a fan—and moves to the stage, with theatrical entertainments designed for the court (“Eurydice Among the Blessed Spirits,” from Gluck’s “Orfeo,” for example). (Danspace Project, St. Mark’s In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Feb. 28-March 3 at 8:30. Through March 10.)

"21 BELOW"
Jennifer Holliday hosts an evening of tap dancing by hoofers who have yet to achieve their majority. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. March 1 at 8.)

DONALD BYRD/THE GROUP
The choreographer presents a child-friendly mini-retrospective of his works, in seventy-five minutes, with excerpts from such pieces as “Not the Shack,” “Folk Dance,” and “Drastic Cuts.” (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. March 1 at 7, March 2 at 2 and 7, and March 3 at noon and 5. Through March 17.)

MOISEYEV DANCE COMPANY
The sixty-six-year-old Moscow-based troupe supplements its traditional Russian dances with folk dances learned on tour in Spain, Japan, Mexico, and the United States. (Lehman Concert Hall, 250 Bedford Park Blvd. W., the Bronx. 718-960-8833. March 2 at 8 and March 3 at 2.)

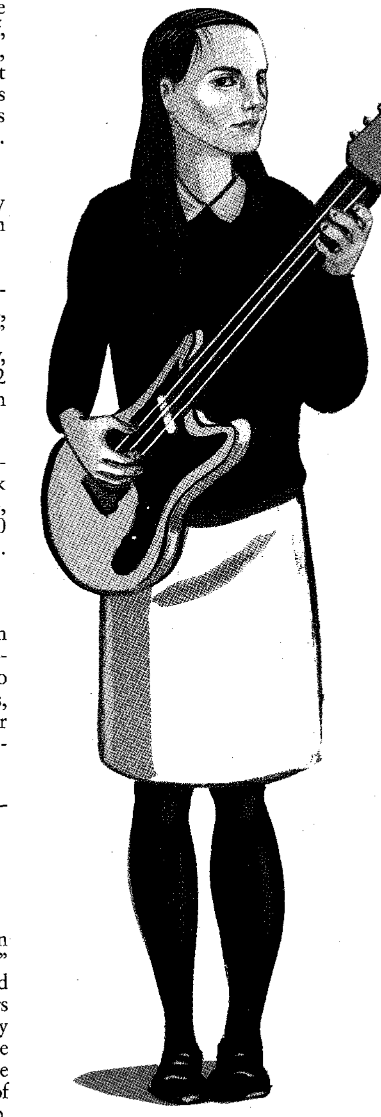
NATIONAL DANCE THEATRE COMPANY OF JAMAICA
The fifty-member company, under the direction of the founder Rex Nettleford, presents two programs, with works by Clive Thompson, Arsenio Andrade, Monika Lawrence, and Arlene Richards, among others. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. March 2 at 8 and March 3 at 2.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

GORILLAZ
Originally conceived as a hip British cartoon by then flatmates Damon Albarn (of Blur) and “Tank Girl” illustrator Jamie Hewlett, Gorillaz took on a life and credibility of its own shortly after such collaborators as Dan (the Automator) Nakamura, Del tha Funky Homosapien, Kid Koala, and various members of the Tom Tom Club and Cibo Matto got involved. The eponymous début album boasted a dizzying mix of genres, bouncing between hip-hop and trip-hop, punk rock and dub reggae. Thanks also to the complicated animated mythology behind them (visit www.gorillaz.com to get an idea), Gorillaz became a genuine cult phenomenon. The trick in concert will be maintaining the mystique. The Banana Splits never made it this far. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 307-7171. Feb. 28 at 8.)

JAZZ AT THE PENTHOUSE
Two veteran tenor-saxophone players, **Frank Wess** and **Lew Tabackin**, flaunt the deeply seductive powers of their instruments in a program titled “Boudoir Tenors,” with the help of a pair of younger woodwind Casanovas, **Wayne Escoffery** and **Stephen Riley.** The pianist **Bill Charlap** and his trio assist. Bring a date. (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. 721-6500. Feb. 28-March 2 at 8.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Feb. 28 at 8: Unlike other quirky jazz innovators—Thelonious Monk and Ornette Coleman spring to mind—the pianist **Cecil Taylor** has yet to find a comfortable place in the popular imagination. He still sounds as visionary and disruptive, as poetic and discursive, as he must have back in 1957, when he first startled a staid jazz scene with his outright rejection of standard rhythms and formalized improvisatory ploys, not to mention his liberal—and terrifying—use of tonal clusters and other outré devices adapted from modern classical music. The sheer athleticism of Taylor’s astounding technique mesmerizes; as for his musical torrents, it’s best to let yourself be engulfed—you’ll come out battered but enlightened. (Alice Tully Hall.) ♦ March 1 at 8: A Celtic Fiddle Festival brings in **Kevin Burke, Johnny Cunningham,** and **Christian LeMaitre.** (Haft Auditorium, Fashion Institute of Technology, 227 W. 27th St.). ♦ March 2 at 8: The American Folk Roots Festival winds down with a night of bluegrass. The **Lynn Morris Band** is noteworthy for the down-home and dulcet voice of the lead singer. The **Whitetop Mountain Band,** which hales from Grayson County, Virginia, brings with it the added bonus of rural flat-foot dancers, some fifty of which, counting the hangers-on, are following the band by bus. (Haft Auditorium.) For more information about all the shows, call 545-7536.



Scout Niblett, at the Knitting Factory.

ALISON SEIFFER

AMERICAN SONGBOOK
Led by Stephin Merritt, one of New York’s most respected underground artists and a reluctant antihero whose music is as catchy as his dour bons mots are clever, **Magnetic Fields** performs, for the last time ever, or so the band claims, the entirety of their wildly eclectic 1999 three-disk release “69 Love Songs.” Not to be missed. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. March 1-2 at 8.)

ALIEN ANT FARM
Making their initial splash with a punked-out cover of Michael Jackson’s “Smooth Criminal,” Southern California’s finest aren’t wildly different from the rest of the nation’s other silly, bowling-shirt-wearing bands for whom punk and heavy metal aren’t so much about angst and rebellion as they are about willfully stupid fun. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. March 2 at 7:15.)

NATHAN AND THE ZYDECO CHA CHAS
The accordionist Nathan Williams named his group for a song by the late zydeco monarch Clifton Chenier, but Williams is no nostalgic traditionalist. His band mixes R. & B. influences into its musical stew (they once recorded a French version of Stevie Wonder’s “Isn’t She Lovely”), and the result is some of the best dance music around. (Hungarian House, 213 E. 82nd St. For more information, call 685-7597. March 3 at 7:30.)

JOAN BAEZ
The sixties folk diva continues to (in the words of the old protest song) “Carry It On.” With the storytelling singer-songwriter Richard Shindell. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. March 5 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it’s advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

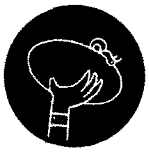
BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—March 1: With a voice as familiar as an old sweater rediscovered at the bottom of a packed closet, **Al Stewart** returns to play the smartly crafted, lushly produced pop songs like “Year of the Cat” and “Time Passages” that practically defined the mid-seventies. March 2: The folkie Canadian rocker **Bruce Cockburn.**

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—March 4: The downtown troubadour **Peter Salett** has a talent for engaging narratives that is complemented nicely by a rich voice as well as a set of thick sideburns. Salett, whose guitar strummings enlivened the recent independent film “Wet Hot American Summer,” will be previewing songs from his forthcoming, as yet unnamed, new album.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Feb. 28: A night of twenty-first-century bossa nova, with **Bebel Gilberto.** March 5: **Starsailor** is the latest British export to mine the emotive soil that Radiohead abandoned in favor of progressive experimentation. Named after an album by doomed folk singer Tim Buckley, father of equally doomed rocker Jeff Buckley, this foursome joins the ranks of Travis and Coldplay to push their own brand of accessible, heartfelt guitar pop.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 2: **Scout Niblett** consists of the eighteen-year-old guitarist and singer Emma Louise Niblett and, occasionally, her friend Kristian Goddard, a drummer. On her début record, “Sweet Heart Fever,” the Nottingham native, who plays her instrument with a childlike intensity that matches her disarmingly raw voice, calls to mind the musings of that

TABLES FOR TWO



BLUE FIN
1567 Broadway, at 47th St. (918-1400)—This Times Square fish palace is vast, cool, and serene, like a fjord. Nearly four hundred people can disappear into its two levels, which are done in "cocoon" upstairs (that's what they're calling brown) and downstairs in "white" (that's what they're calling white). An eighty-foot terrazzo staircase connecting the two floors proves irresistible to anybody in black—about half the clientele and all the staff—and the subdued parade of silhouettes going up and down is as mesmerizing as anything on the flashing JumboTron outside. That's at lunch—the parade grows feistier around cocktail hour, when patrons begin to make the treacherous climb from the street-level bar to the rest rooms upstairs.

Probably because the place is so new (it's in the W Hotel), the attentiveness level of the wait gang can be unnervingly high, as if you'd wandered into a private bank by mistake. Once, after a seating mixup, a manager asked for business cards, so as to assure prime tables for all future reservations. Another day, a diner idly wished for a second plate of bread, and seconds later it appeared.

Paul Sale (who started as a chef in the British Merchant Navy, and moved on to Le Bernardin) serves fresh cuts of fish matched with solid flavors. The Maine-lobster salad is a mix of claw flesh and summery cucumber and citrus. The "big eye" tuna shows up on a nest of peppery radish sprouts. The Chilean sea bass comes with leeks and fennel, and the wild salmon comes with seared sprigs of thyme—more riverbank, less saucepot. Even the arch touches, such as the occasional black-pepper gnocchi, the painterly "parsley pesto drizzle," are underplayed, without the food-channel theatrics. This leaves room for the more naturally baroque portions of the meal: the tasting of crème brûlées, the trinity of chocolates in shades of rich, dark cocoon. (Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées $19-$38.)

—*Kevin Conley*

other enigmatically appealing vocalist Cat Power. But Niblett has a garage-rock side: "Big Bad Man," a short power-chord-driven stomper of a song about a child-eating country recluse, includes the chorus "I'm goin' to cook you some real food," which Niblett delivers with moist passion. March 5: **Lambchop**. The singer, songwriter, and guitarist Kurt Wagner's ever-expanding band (membership has approached twenty) is sometimes called alt-country, but only because Wagner's production is reminiscent of the lush, string-drenched countrypolitan sound of the mid-eighties. In truth, Lambchop's aesthetic is closer to the hushed funk of Curtis Mayfield, whose songs the band has covered. Lambchop's new album, "Is a Woman," is more skeletal than their previous efforts, but Wagner's original songs remain among the most trenchant pop creations out there, both sarcastic and sentimental. With **David Kilgour**.

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-5252)—March 1: Noisy progenitors of experimental rock in the discordant vein of vintage Sonic Youth, **Blonde Redhead** takes its name from a song by Arto Lindsay's seminal no-wave trio, DNA. March 2: **Patti Smith** and her band come out to support the Greenpoint/Williamsburg Waterfront Task Force.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through March 9: The eighteen-year-old college freshman and up-and-coming pop and jazz vocalist **Peter Cincotti**. Dining.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—March 2: A collection of six-string sharpshooters, including David Fiuczynski, Ronny Jordan, Eric Krasno, Rodney Jones, and Mark Whitfield, descend on this Times Square club for a evening of jazz-guitar heroics. Few notes, if any, will go unplucked.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Feb. 28-March 2: Joe Henderson's death last year deprived the world of one of the most lyrical of all tenor saxophonists. Saluting this introspective stylist and superior composer will be a trio of inventive tenors, each touched by Henderson's intelligence and taste: **Dave Liebman, Craig Handy,** and **Jimmy Greene.** Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through March 3: A double bill of **Ray Barretto and New World Spirit** and **Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band.**

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through March 23, the vocalist **David Campbell.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—Through March 2: The accomplished and decorous pianist **George Shearing** had a good thing going with the legendary vocalist Mel Tormé until the latter's death, in 1999, exploring standards with the invention and élan that only practiced veterans who have lived with the material can. In his tribute to the Velvet Fog, Shearing is backed by a trio featuring the guitarist Reg Schwager and the superb bassist Neil Swainson.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—March 2: The buzz is very strong on **Norah Jones,** and with good reason: she has a mesmerizing voice, fine songwriting skills, great taste in cover material, and stunning looks. There's enough jazz, folk, pop, blues, and other influences in her approach to make her nearly unclassifiable—an artistic bonus that one hopes won't be seen as a detriment by Blue Note, her recording company. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Through March 3: A whole new generation of bright young pianists—Brad Mehldau, Jason Moran, and Renee Rosnes among them—still haven't stolen any of **Geri Allen's** thunder. Her telepathic trio, with the bassist **Robert Hurst** and the drummer **Billy Hart,** allows Allen to cut a brazen swath through nearly a century of jazz-piano idioms, while buffing them to a modernist sheen. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

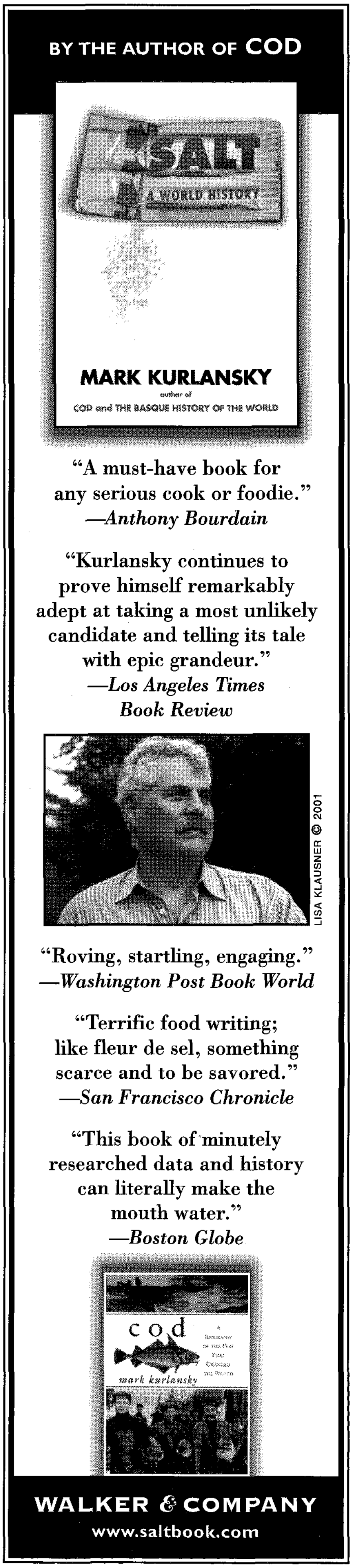
JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—March 6: **Norah Jones** (see Fez).

SMOKE
2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (864-6662)—March 1-2: Now that Cannonball Adderley's brother Nat is gone, who better to lead a tribute honoring the effervescent alto saxophonist than the drummer **Louis Hayes**? He was the swinging motor behind Cannonball's pioneering hard-bop band during its glory days. **Vincent Herring,** a youngish alto who once worshiped at Cannonball's altar but who has since found his own voice, is the featured soloist.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through March 3: **Ray Drummond,** New York's most reliable bassist, steps out with his own quartet. When you lay down the kind of shag-carpet bottom that Drummond regularly does, anything on top sounds good. Having the saxophonist **Craig Handy** on hand is an added bonus. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"**Surrealism: Desire Unbound**" is a big, fairly resistible show, with



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scattered delights, that labors to pump up the long-deflated blimp of Surrealism with a panting emphasis on sex. There's fine work by Picasso, Miró, and Giacometti, but the more orthodox dream illustrations of Dali, Ernst, and so on look more tired than ever. The show's strong suits are erotic photography and drawing; its man of the hour is Hans Bellmer, the weird German whose indelibly shocking photos of anatomically preposterous female dolls are back in vogue these days. Masses of often racy books, documents, and ephemera generate coolly libidinous chic along with a certain prurient air. Imagine a Starr Report issued by a committee of fallen librarians. On the plus side, no show that interrelates Man Ray, Frida Kahlo, and Jackson Pollock can in good conscience be missed. Through May 5. ♦ **"Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi: Father and Daughter Painters in Baroque Italy."** Virtually the only woman painter among the fraternity of Old Masters, Artemisia Gentileschi has inspired novels, films, and a current play, thanks in part to speculation about her romantic misfortunes. Was she raped by her father's colleague? Or was she simply, as one sixties-era scholar put it, "a lascivious and precocious girl" who sued her lover for not making good on his marriage promises? Either way, she was a painter of great and often grisly refinement, as this dual survey makes clear. Like Caravaggio, who inspired their realist style, the Gentileschis didn't skimp on skin, gold, velvet, or violence; Artemisia's depiction of Judith modelling a low-cut blue gown as she beheads a struggling Holofernes is a cleavage picture in both senses. While Artemisia rarely equalled the delicacy of her father's naturalism, she had a more focussed eye for narrative nuance: note the way Judith has rolled up her sleeves before getting to work. Through May 12. ♦ **"Earthly Bodies: Irving Penn's Nudes, 1949-50."** In 1949, soon after making a name for himself as a fashion photographer, Irving Penn began a sort of antifashion project. For two years, in his off-hours, he took close-up photographs of undressed, ample women. Cropped at the knees and armpits, the resulting torso-scapes are both voluptuous and spare. Some of the sixty prints on view could almost be mistaken for charcoal drawings: a whiplash line carves its way through an expanse of brilliant white paper and—presto!—summons up Willendorfian forms. Through April 21. ♦ **"Benjamin Brecknell: Rural England Through a Victorian Lens."** Through April 21. ♦ **"Splendid Isolation: Art of Easter Island."** Through Aug. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

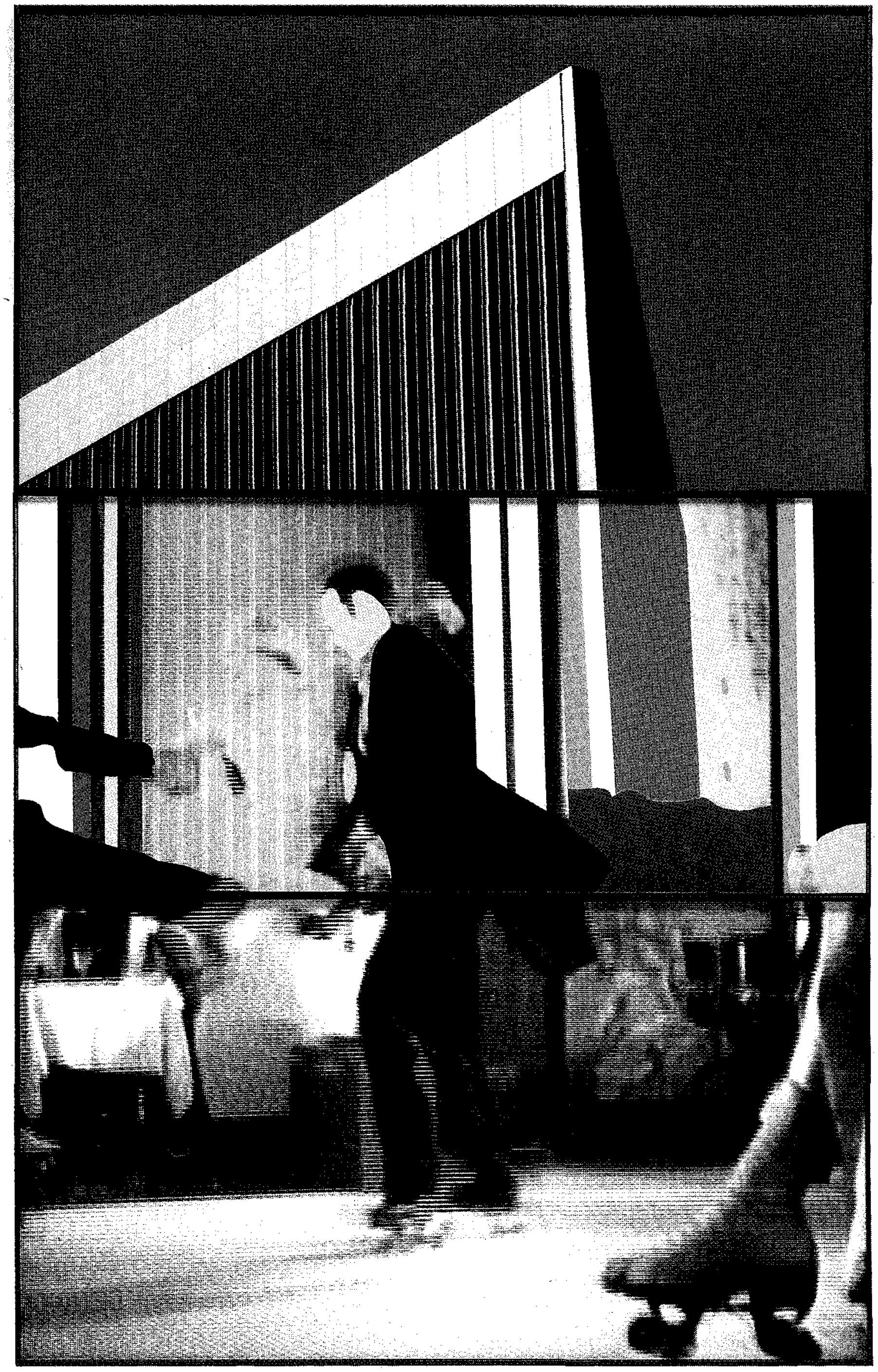
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting."** Through May 21. ♦ The artist Ricci Albenda converts the lower level of the museum into three corridors, toying with perspective and playing spatial games in the gray area between architecture and sculpture. The first, a trompe-l'oeil mural of a corridor, greets viewers as they ride down the escalator. Around the corner, viewers find an actual corridor, the mirror image of the hallway depicted in the mural. A little further on, Albenda presents a shallow relief of the same image. Through May 21. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"Norman Rockwell: Pictures for the American People."** Through March 3. ♦ **"Brazil: Body and Soul."** Through May 29. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—In 1949, Irving Penn offset the rigors of shooting ethereal fashion models by indulging his eye for fleshier subjects. (A show of those photographs is currently on view at the Met.) Fifty years later, the Rubenesque dancer Alexandra Beller posed for Penn for three related series now on view here. The most evocative of these were captured with three-second-long exposures; they suggest the agonizing distortion of Hans Bellmer or Francis Bacon, as the dancer sprouts a third breast and two more arms. Through May 12. ♦ **Note:** Many sections of the museum are closed for installation of the Whitney Biennial, which opens March 7. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)



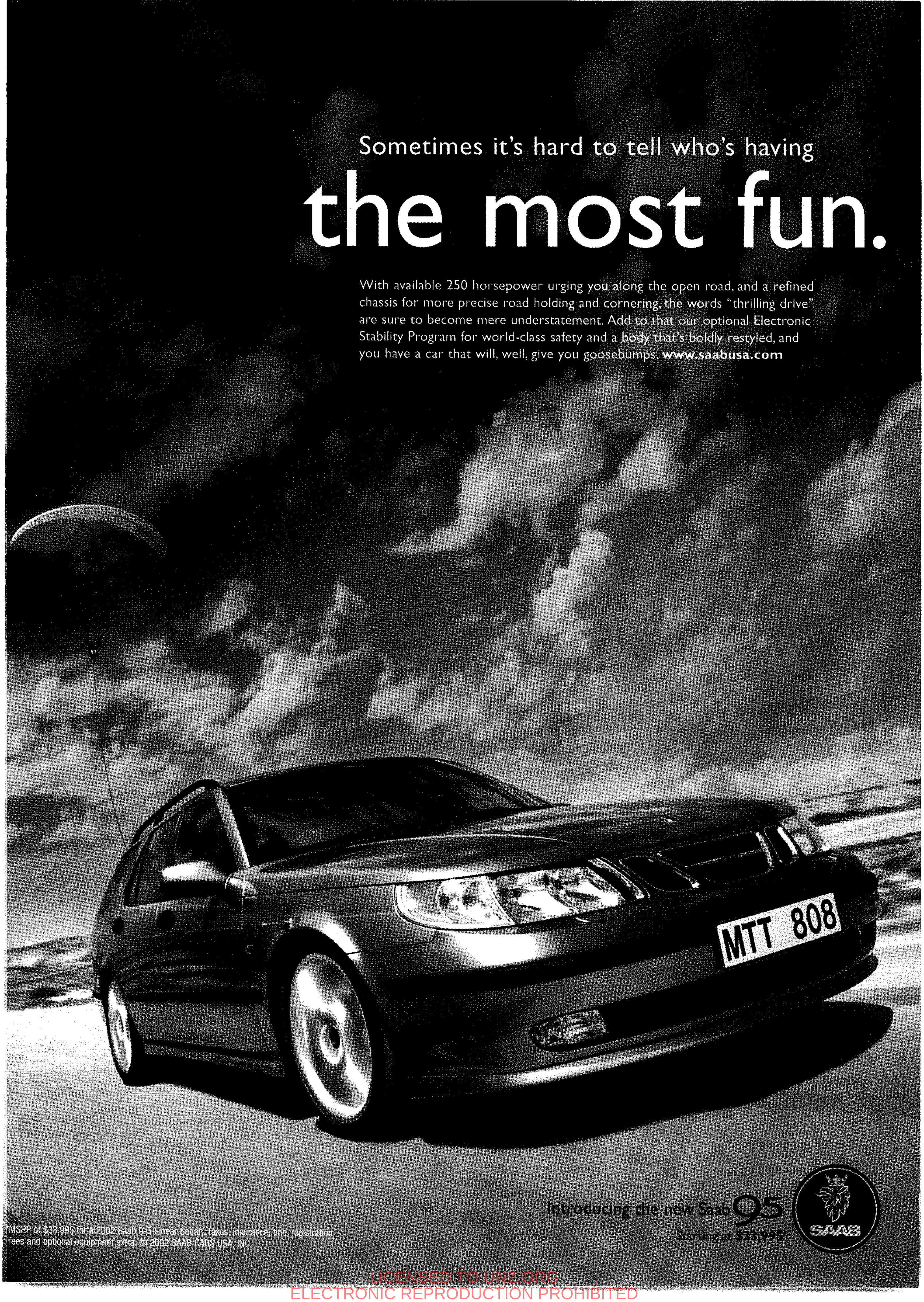
"The Overlap Series: Building (Detail)/People (with Rollerskates)," by John Baldessari, at Marian Goodman.

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—Hip-hop arrives at the institutional phase with **"One Planet Under a Groove: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art,"** an exhibition of thirty artists and artists' groups whose work derives from, pays homage to, or flirts with the sources of rap and hip-hop style. Though the choice of art form—music, fashion, polemic, attitude—depends on the individual artist, a tone of lightly ironic respect predominates, whether the work comes from elder statesmen such as David Hammons and Adrian Piper, eighties-era scenesters Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, or younger practitioners such as Chris Ofili, Nikki S. Lee, Bea Schlingelhoff, and Erik Parker. But don't come for the music: the galleries are curiously devoid of actual sound (unless there's a guard around to turn it on). Through May 26. (Open Wednesdays, noon to 9, and Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

548 W. 22nd St. (989-5566)—Bruce Nauman's new video installation, "Mapping the Studio I (Fat Chance John Cage)," is a magnificent ordeal, five and three-quarter hours long, which rewards the viewer for any time spent with it. Seven vast digital projections, made from tapes that were shot in darkness by infrared light, show areas of the artist's cluttered studio in rural New Mexico. Mice, a cat, and insects come and go, and night sounds are heard: wind, dogs barking, a distant train whistle. Mostly nothing happens in the shimmering, gray-green still-lifes. One has an eerie sense of eavesdropping on existence. As for John Cage, the late composer's jolly aesthetics of chance get a doleful comeuppance. Nauman's scoop on the universe is that it could not care less. Through July 27. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)



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GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

THÉODORE ROUSSEAU
Though the Barbizon star (1812-67) has apparently never been given an exhibition in America until now, his rugged mossy landscapes are apt to look familiar, and not just from art-history textbooks. In the later paintings, you can see where Yankee mystics like Inness and Blakelock got their dappled impasto. To contemporary taste, though, it's the early Rousseau that's most compelling. The group of small plein-air landscapes on view (of streams, caves, and rolling farmland) have the sparkling urgency of Corot or Valenciennes. Through March 9. (Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606.)

STEPHEN SOLLINS
The crafty conceptualist offers a trio of new projects. A set of quasi-landscapes made from pages of a camping-goods catalogue feels—in true camping spirit—like a little more work than it's worth, but the sequence of drawings derived from "The Sound of Music" is a Duchampian charmer. To make them, Sollins traced the "rest" notations from the sheet music for all eleven songs. Of the long, variably empty sheets, only one is entirely blank. Musicians and German speakers will already have guessed which one it is: "Edelweiss." Through March 2. (Mitchell, Innes and Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 744-7400.)

STEPHEN VITIELLO
The artist is a triple threat, a musician and curator, who was inspired to experiment with sound installation after collaborating with such artists as Tony Oursler and Nam June Paik. His New York début opens with a witty suite of sculptures made from damaged loudspeakers, each one broadcasting the sounds of its particular destruction—a cannon shot, a chopping axe, an archer's bull's-eye. Upstairs, feedback from an audio loop of peeping frog chirps—a microphone in orbit, thanks to a disco-ball rotation motor, picks up the chirps from a speaker on the floor—transforming the quaint back gallery with its red-and-yellow windows into a rustic retreat. Through March 17. (The Project, 427 W. 126th St. 662-8610.)

Short List

JOHN BALDESSARI
Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.
Through March 30.
ADAM DANT
Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 861-7338.
Through March 2.
WILLEM DE KOONING
Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 744-7400. Through March 2.
GRANDMA MOSES
Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734.
Through March 16.
KEVIN ZUCKER
Mary Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
752-2929. Through March 2.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ROB DE MAR
Lilliputian landscapes in the form of sculptures, freestanding and wall mounted, made of steel, model trees, and flocking (among other materials) that suggest the whimsical settings of Dr. Seuss books. Seasons shift; the orange-and-red clusters that punctuate "Autumn" give way to a midsummer swimming hole in "Pond" (the body of water is a petrified mushroom covered with blue flocking). The snow-capped arbor of "Tree Line" offsets the island getaway across the room, an emerald island dotted with palm trees set amid a tangled lattice of pale blue that could be sea foam. Through March 9. (Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937.)

DAVID SHAPIRO
"100,000 Holes," the title of Shapiro's latest work, seems to refer both to the ephemera-hung pegboard from which he built this small room within a room, and the recesses of the mind of its implied inhabitant. Those who enter encounter the detritus of a fictionalized youth, including the boards from a do-it-yourself coffin-making kit and several detailed drawings of tunnel systems, one the Viet Cong's, the other his rendition of the Maginot Line. Their romanticized depths hint at the teen-age profundity that Shapiro caricatures and seeks to recapture. Through March 9. (Liebman Magnan, 552 W. 24th St. 255-3225.)

JANET SOBEL
For years, a drip painting by Sobel (1894-1968) hung kitty-corner from Jackson Pollock's "Autumn Rhythm" at MOMA; but how many people, outside a small circle of experts, knew that a Jewish grandmother from Brooklyn may have inspired Pollock's famous technique? This egregiously overdue survey (her last exhibition was in 1946) offers a glimpse of various Sobel styles, ranging from trippy Chagallist watercolors to the meandering traceries of her brief abstract phase. The later works, with their fractured, leering rainbows, are so persuasively hallucinatory that one begins to wonder whether Sobel was, along with everything else, a pharmacological pioneer. Through March 9. (Snyder, 601 W. 29th St. 871-1077.)

Short List

GREG BOGIN
Mary Boone, 541 W. 24th St. 752-2929.
Through March 2.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN
In 1964, with the aid of some scantily clad actors and a lot of raw chicken, the artist staged "Meat Joy," a writhing romp of Dionysian excess that scandalized audiences. It's now considered a key work of body art, and Schneemann, once relegated to the status of feminist footnote, recently sold her papers to the Getty Center. A projected videotape of the original and still squirm-inducing performance is installed in the back of this mini-retrospective, which spans four decades. The earliest work remains the most enticing. Through March 9. (P.P.O.W., 476 Broome St. 941-8642.)

Short List

TIM HAWKINSON
Ace, 275 Hudson St. 255-5599.
Through March 30.
MARLENE MCCARTY
Keenan, 3 Crosby St. 431-5083.
Through March 23.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

GARY PANTER
Panter, who won three Emmy awards for his design work on "Pee-wee's Playhouse," has re-created his own adolescent clubhouse in an installation that he describes as "an outgrowth of light shows I did in my garage in the sixties." Viewers can lounge on a low couch and watch Panter's stoners' paradise of light and shadow. They can also peek behind the curtain to find the wizard and his flashlight-bearing assistants in a complex dance around a wooden scaffold hung with paper snowflakes, reflectors, filters, and a disco ball. Through March 18; *call for show times.* (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

"MADE IN BROOKLYN: SELECTION ONE"
Any exhibit big enough to include sixty artists should be too crammed full of work to enjoy. But this show extends over eight rooms, each one as large as most galleries; and the carefully chosen collection feels less like an overstuffed salon than a small museum. Marsha Pels's frosted-glass infants sinking into plump marble throw pillows stand out among many pleasant surprises for a sense-confounding effect as old as

BOOK CURRENTS

Got a Light?

MARC ROSENTHAL

Legend has it that in the late nineteen-twenties the president of American Tobacco was sitting in his car at Fifth Avenue and 110th Street when he noticed nearby an overweight woman chewing gum and then, in a passing taxicab, a slim, short-skirted young woman smoking a cigarette. It marked a milestone in the industry's long history of marketing tobacco to women. Tara Parker-Pope relates this and other anecdotes in **CIGARETTES: ANATOMY OF AN INDUSTRY FROM SEED TO SMOKE** (New Press), which details the many ways tobacco has been touted as a quality-of-life enhancer: as a symbol of autonomy for women, for example, or as protection against the plague, in 1665. Most ads between 1938 and 1983 focussed on healthy living; in the nineteen-fifties the introduction of a filter for Liggett's L&M brand was accompanied by the slogan "Just what the doctor ordered."

In **SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES** (Abbeville), by Michael Thibodeau and Jana Martin, a history of design in the tobacco industry, there are Camels, but also Emus, Llamas, Eagles, and Puppies. And brands like Santé, Sincere, Peace, and Hope are counterweighted by more ominous varieties, such as Cancer, Defiance, Death, and Go to Hell.

Smoking offers adventure to the sedentary and wisdom to the innocent; Iain Gately studies the romance in **TOBACCO** (Grove), a sweeping history of the leaf that moves from cigar-rolling factories staffed by scantily clad women in Seville to tobacco farms in what would become Greenwich Village. Despite medical caveats, the popularity of tobacco persists, and Gately finds clues as to why in literary history: Sherlock Holmes puffs through "a three-pipe problem" and Baudelaire "smokes his pipe, allaying heart and mind, / and for tonight all injuries are healed."

—*Lauren Porcaro*

The glacier-carved freshwater fjord at Western Brook Pond.

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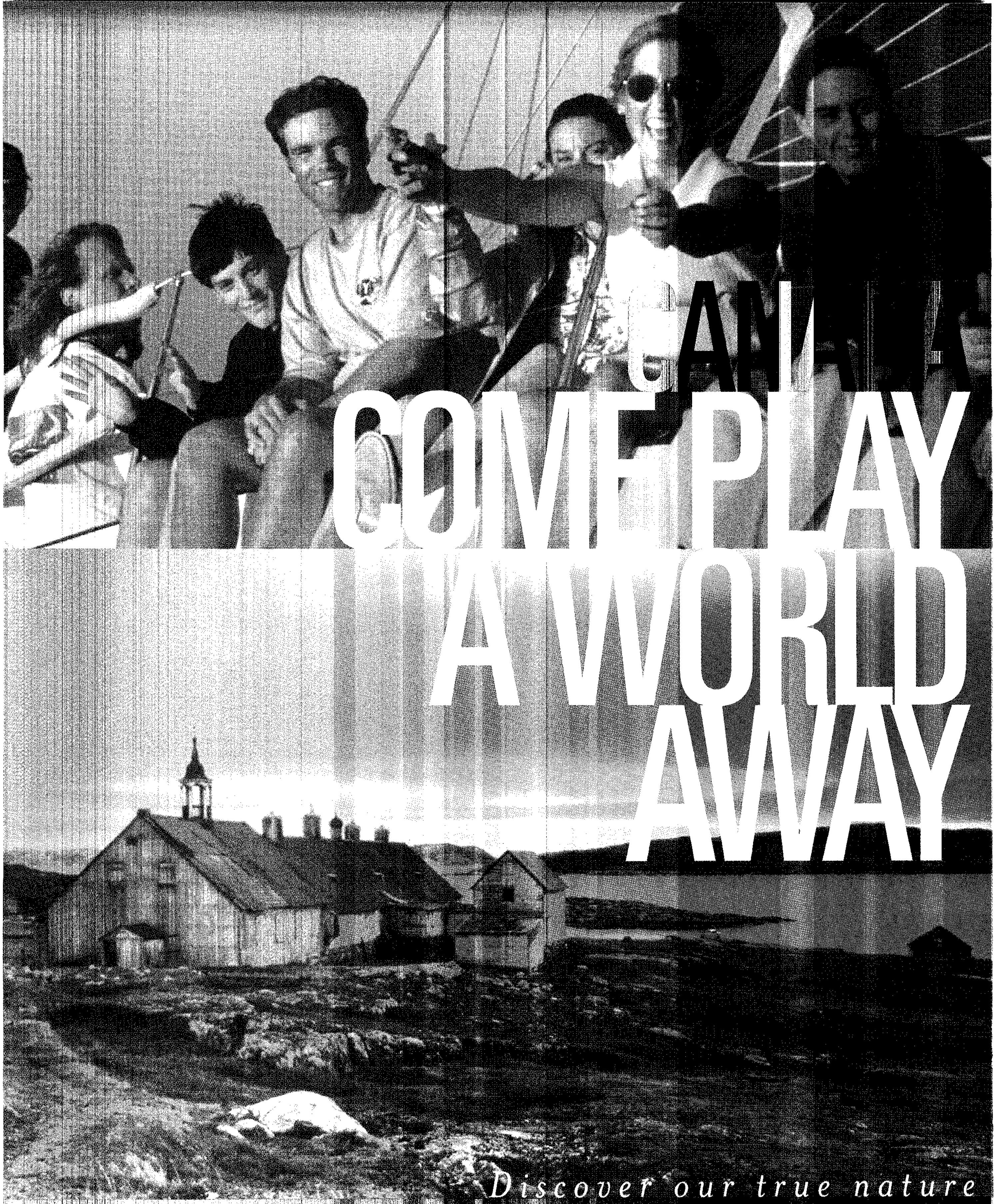
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Canada

the Greeks—how could something so cuddly be re-created in cold stone? Through March 4. (Wythe Studio, 240 Wythe Ave. 917-916-7215.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

JAN DUNNING
The photographer, who models in her day job, here takes her own image back from stylists and photographers. Grainy color pinhole photographs are double exposed to show the artist bathing or dancing with herself. Other landscapes are covered with drawings traced in pinprick holes—the ghostly outline of a rat over a photograph of a road, the silhouette of a roller coaster over a subdivision, a family portrait over a frozen playground. Through March 3. (31 Grand, 31 Grand St., Brooklyn. 718-388-2858.)

PETER GARFIELD
The author of "Mobile Homes," a catalogue purporting to show the use of airborne buildings in photographs, has no plans to compete with that achievement in deception (he achieved the surreal effect by dangling toy houses from strings). His new body of work, "Objects with Potential," looks less like a trip to Oz than Kansas on a quiet day: white-coated yuppies stride purposefully through a complex of digitally multiplied aluminum buildings. Through March 2. (Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.)

MARGI GEERLINKS
The Rotterdam native, whose previous work has included scenes of tailors piecing together young men, and women knitting themselves plump new babies, here grants her subjects' wishes for their bodies. A child crochets a breast and holds it up to her chest, only to have it grow an all too real nipple; an older woman runs a powder puff over her cheek, smoothing the skin back to a youthful sheen. They're better off than the models who have sprouted a form of erotic stigmata: lip-glossed mouths all over their arms, legs, and bodies. Through March 16. (Stux, 529 W. 20th St. 352-1600.)

ARTUR NIKODEM
Between 1914 and 1930, the celebrated Tyrolean painter Artur Nikodem got free cameras and photographic supplies from a friend in the business. The majority of his pictures are intimate, sensual portraits of younger women who served as muses. In many of these dark prints, the only white is the glowing flesh of an undressed woman, often looking directly into the lens with a soft, knowing smile. Through March 2. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 989-7600.)

LENI RIEFENSTAHL
The versatile actress, filmmaker, and photographer was recruited early in her career by Hitler to produce epic films for his Ministry of Propaganda. The association has stuck with her ever since, and probably explains why this show is her American début. The pictures here, made during the shooting of the film "Olympia," aggrandize the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. A pole-vaulter suspended in midair, a diver on the point of entering the water, a spooky stadium at night, surrounded by searchlights, as if it were being beamed up into a spaceship—the impressive selection here brings out the ecstatic and otherworldly quality of her drive to exalt, but the show does nothing to dissociate the artist from the Aryan ideologue. Through March 8. (Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 680-9889.)

FRANK THIEL
The American début of this Berlin native offers panoramic views of the capital city. Fifteen oversized color prints, fairly evenly split between images of isolated structural elements and more panoptic views of the city, chronicle Berlin's ongoing reconstruction. The architectural portraits of rebar, scaffolding, and poured concrete show a fascination with the geometry of progress. These prints contrast with the views of the Potsdamer-Platz and the Reichstag, which are filled with such endearing minutiae as the crane operator caught resting his muttonchops against his knuckles. Through April 6. (Sean Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 239-1181.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 857-0000—**"Another Vietnam: Pictures of the War from the Other Side"** looks at Southeast Asia in the sixties and early seventies from the eyes of Vietcong soldiers, reporters, and state-sanctioned photographers. Through March 17. ♦ The photographs in **"Hidden Truths: Bloody Sunday 1972"** bear witness to the events of January 30, 1972, when the British Army killed thirteen Republican protesters and bystanders in Derry, Northern Ireland. Through March 17. ♦ **"The First Snapshots,"** an exhibition of candids shot by amateur photographers in the eighteen-hundreds with the earliest Kodak cameras. Through March 17. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

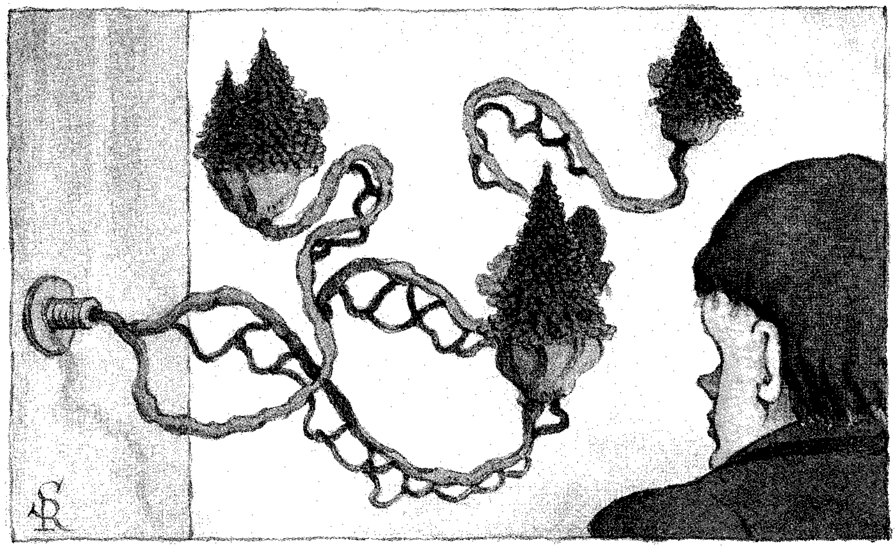
Short List

EDWARD BURTYNSKY
Cowles, 537 W. 24th St. 925-3500.
Through March 9.

HENRI CARTIER-BRESSON
Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.
Through March 9.

WILLIAM EGGLESTON
Yancey Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St.
646-230-9610. Through March 16.

See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum.



Rob de Mar's sculptural landscapes, at Clementine.

SERGIO RUZZIER

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
March 2 at 9:30 A.M. and 2: "Finest and Rarest Wines," including vintages from Bordeaux, Burgundy, California, and the Rhône. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

DOYLE
Feb. 27 at 10 A.M.: "Belle Époque," a selection of furniture, paintings, and decorations from the Victorian and Edwardian eras and beyond. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

SWANN
Feb. 28 at 10:30 A.M.: The house offers its seventh annual sale of "Printed and Manuscript African-Americana," including such items as a signed copy of Matthew Henson's memoir "A Negro Explorer at the North Pole" and art works by Romare Bearden and James Amos Porter. The auction concludes with the sale of a single lot to benefit the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change: a de-luxe portfolio of fifteen photographs of the civil-rights leader, taken during the last year of his life by Benedict J. Fernandez and sold along with a special-edition Leica M6 camera engraved with Dr. King's signature. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

TRIPLE PIER ANTIQUES SHOW
Six hundred exhibits of antiques, collectibles, and decorative objects. (Piers 88, 90, and 92, Twelfth Ave. at 48th, 50th, and 52nd Sts. 255-0020. March 2-3 and March 9-10.)

"WORKS ON PAPER"
The fourteenth annual show, with eighty international dealers offering a wide range of watercolors, prints, posters, photography, and more. Among this year's highlights are works by such artists as Modigliani, Dürer ("Das Grosse Pferd," an engraving from 1505), Motherwell, and Sonia Delaunay. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Feb. 28-March 3. For more information, call 777-5218.)

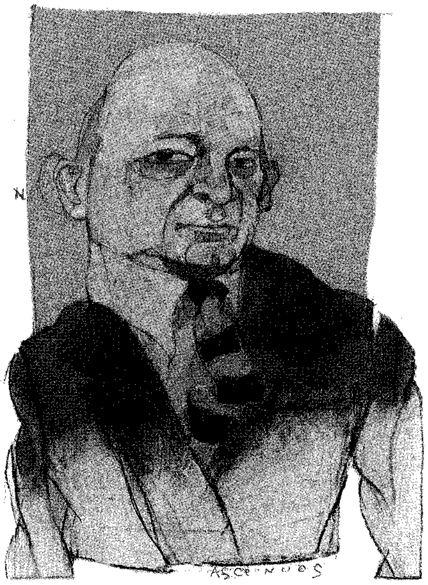
CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Tosca," with Georgina Lukács (her début), Richard Leech, and Carlo Guelfi (another début, as Scarpia); Julius Rudel conducts. (Feb. 27 at 8 and March 2 at 8:30.) ♦ The final performance this season of **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** a joyful revival of Jonathan Miller's 1998 production, conducted, with brio, by Donald Runnicles. With Ferruccio Furlanetto (in the title role), Melanie Diener, Rebecca Evans, Angelika Kirchschlager, and Michele Pertusi. (Feb. 28 at 7:30.) ♦ **"Rigoletto,"** with Ruth Ann Swenson, Denyce Graves, Marcelo Álvarez, Juan Pons, and Robert Lloyd; Marco Guidarini. (March 1 and March 5 at 8.) ♦ Andrei Konchalovsky's première production of Prokofiev's **"War and Peace"**—conducted, with brisk command and dusky glamour, by Valery Gergiev—is among the Met's most impressive accomplishments. George Tsypin's sets, teasing fragments of period architecture and eerie shafts of light, provide a cool, postmodern frame for a grand showcase of ensemble singing by an immense cast, with indelible contributions from Anna Netrebko, Ekaterina Semenchuk, Elena Obraztsova, Dmitri Hvorostovsky, Gegam Grigorian, Samuel Ramey, Vassily Gerello, and John Cheek. (March 2 at 12:30.) ♦ A return of John Dexter's celebrated 1981 triple bill of modern French music theatre, designed by David Hockney, and conducted (for the first time) by James Levine. Satie's surrealist ballet **"Parade,"** from 1917 (choreographed by Gray Veredon and featuring Damien Woetzel, making his Met début, and Christine McMillan), is followed by two operas that it influenced, Poulenc's **"Les Mamelles de Tirésias"** (with Ainhoa Arteta, Jane Bunnell, Earle Patriarco, Mark Oswald, and, in his début, John Hancock) and Ravel's **"L'Enfant et les Sortilèges"** (featuring Danielle de Niese, Wendy White, Olga

Makarina, Ruth Ann Swenson, Oswald, and Patriarco). (March 4 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
The company opens its spring season with a return of its 2000 production of **"Porgy and Bess."** The first of three previews features Marquita Lister and Alvy Powell (as Bess and Porgy), Angela Renée Simpson and Timothy Robert Blevins (as Serena and Crown), and Dwayne Clark (as Sportin' Life); the conductor is John DeMain, closely associated with the piece since the Houston Grand Opera production of 1976 (which reëstablished the work in the modern repertory). (March 1 at 8.) ♦ With Alison Buchanan, James Edward Pierce, Rochelle Ellis, Cedric Cannon, and Clark; Richard Bado. (March 2 at 1:30.) ♦ With Marsha Thompson, Leonard Rowe, Monique McDonald, Blevins, and Clark; DeMain. (March 2 at 8.) ♦ The official première, featuring the cast and conductor of March 1. (March 3 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 307-4100.)



POLISH POWER *By some lucky accident, the music of Witold Lutosławski (1913-94) is all over town this week: listeners can hear the Third Symphony performed by the Philharmonic, sample the Variations on a Theme of Paganini at Carnegie Hall, or head uptown to take in the lush, Ravel-like Piano Concerto at Manhattan School of Music. Aristocratic by birth and intellectual by temperament, Lutosławski could accommodate the chance techniques of Cage into music of crystalline grandeur, maintaining a melancholy equipoise that honors the memory of Chopin.*

PIAZZOLLA'S "PUEBLO JOVEN"
Pablo Zinger is the music director for the U.S. première of this tango opera, which features Katie Viquiera and Juan Villarreal in the leading roles. (Town Hall. 840-2824. March 3 at 3.)

OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK
Eve Queler conducts a hundred-year anniversary performance, in concert, of Cilea's sturdy verismo vehicle, **"Adriana Lecouvreur,"** with Aprile Millo, Dolora Zajick, and Marcello Giordani. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 3 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
The high spirits of Bartók's "Romanian Folk Dances" make a friendly beginning for another of the conductor Leonard Slatkin's intriguing twentieth-century programs. Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto (with Arcadi Volodos) is a young maverick's attack on the genre, four quick movements couched in a sardonic, slashing idiom; Lutosławski's Third Symphony is a product of the Polish composer's refulgent later style, with a balance of driving energy and elegant craft that harks back to Haydn. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Feb. 28, March 2, and March 4 at 8 and March 1 at 2.)

WDR ORCHESTRA OF COLOGNE
Semyon Bychkov highlights the crisp and colorful playing of his German ensemble with a program rich in contrasts, leading music by Magnus Lindberg ("Feria"), Takemitsu, Lutosławski (the "Paganini Variations," with the pianists Katia and Marielle Labèque), and Strauss ("Ein Heldenleben"). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Feb. 27 at 8.)

HANDEL'S "ESTHER"
In honor of Purim, the 92nd Street Y presents a performance of Handel's English oratorio—based on the legend of Esther, the Jewish queen of ancient Persia—with an alternate Hebrew libretto, crafted in 1759 by the Venetian rabbi Jacob Saraval. The performers include the singers Suzie LeBlanc and Michael Chance, along with the Oslo Baroque Soloists choir and the musicians of Il Gardellino. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500. Feb. 26-27 at 8.)

"AN EVENING WITH KATHLEEN BATTLE"
The soprano makes a rare New York appearance, with the Collegiate Chorale and the Orchestra of St. Luke's, in a program featuring music by Bellini, Rossini, Verdi, and spirituals. Robert Bass conducts. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 1 at 8.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC SYMPHONY
Gunther Schuller is one of American music's great survivors, a virtuoso conductor-composer whose music combines the craggy intellectuality of Schoenberg with the sultry atmosphere of jazz (which he knows more about than almost anyone). He conducts the orchestra in Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony, Lutosławski's Piano Concerto (with Jessica Bruser), and his own classic "Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee." (Borden Auditorium, Broadway at 122nd St. March 1 at 8. No tickets required.)

NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS
Clara Longstreth conducts the chorus in a wide-ranging modern program, featuring music by Poulenc, Rautavaara, Messiaen, Adolphus Hailstork, and Judith Shatin ("Songs of War and Peace," a première). (Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Central Park W. at 65th St. 568-5948. March 1 at 8 and March 3 at 4.)

PHILHARMONIA VIRTUOSI
Richard Kapp conducts a program featuring music by Haydn, Schumann (the Cello Concerto, with Carter Brey), and Stravinsky. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 570-3949. March 2 at 7.)

BOSTON PHILHARMONIC
Benjamin Zander, a charismatic maestro whose performances match expressive intensity with rigorous attention to detail, brings his orchestra to Carnegie Hall. March 2 at 8: Mahler's Symphony No. 9. (247-7800.) ♦ March 4 at 7:30: A free concert for people new to classical music, featuring works by Mozart, Tchaikovsky, and Beethoven (the "Ode to Joy"). (Tickets, which are required, must be requested in person at the Carnegie Hall box office.)

RECITALS

EMERSON STRING QUARTET
The ensemble performs Beethoven's "Razumovsky" quartets. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Feb. 27 at 8.)

MILLER THEATRE: MUSIC BY JULIA WOLFE
Ensemble Sospeso presents an overview of this downtown composer's intense and visionary work, including a rare performance of "My Lips from Speaking" (for six pianos) and the New York première of "Mink Stole." (Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Feb. 28 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
Feb. 28 and March 1 at 7:30: Music by Beethoven, Sessions ("From My Diary"), and Dvořák (the "Dumky" Trio), performed by the violinist Ida Levin, the cellist Ronald Thomas, and the pianist Randall Hodgkinson. ♦ March 2 at 7:30 and March 3 at 4: The violist Marcus Thompson joins the ensemble in music by Mozart, Ravel, and Fauré (the Piano Quartet in C Minor). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG
A celebration of the work of P. G. Wodehouse, who wrote lyrics for such composers as Jerome Kern and George Gershwin when he wasn't concentrating on the merry lives of Jeeves and Bertie Wooster. Steven Blier hosts at the piano, in an evening that features the singers Sylvia McNair and Hal Cazalet and the guitarist Gregory Utzig, doubling on banjo. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 230-8382. Feb. 28 at 8.)

JOSEPH KAISER
The young American baritone, winner of the first Autrey Award for young singers, makes his New York recital début with a program featuring music by Weill, Schubert, and the première of "Light Verse," Richard Beaudoin's settings of poems by John Updike. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 2 at 8:30.)

BRYN TERFEL
A new song cycle by Jake Heggie ("The Moon Is a Mirror") highlights a recital by the commanding Welsh baritone, who also sings music by Schubert, Quilter, Duparc, Copland, and Vaughan Williams. The pianist is Malcolm Martineau. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 3 at 2.)

ANDRÁS SCHIFF
Music by Mozart dominates the pianist's Carnegie Hall program, including the Fantasia in C Minor and three sonatas. (247-7800. March 5 at 7:30.)

EIGHTH BLACKBIRD
True to its spirit, the contemporary chamber ensemble presents a program mixing the serious (George Perle's new work "Critical Moments II") with the absurd (Aaron Kernis's "Four Seasons of Futurist Cuisine," narrated by Babbo chef Mario Batali) in a concert also featuring music by Daniel Kellogg and the four young creators of the Minimum Security Composers Collective. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. March 5 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
Feb. 28 at 7: The journalist David M. Lawrence offers selections from his latest book, "Upheaval from the Abyss: Ocean Floor Mapping and the Earth Science Revolution." (The Corner Bookstore, Madison Ave. at 93rd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Feb. 28 at 7: The Teachers & Writers Collaborative presents an evening of Arabic verse with the Palestinian poet Taha Muhammad Ali, who will read from his work, and with Michael Sells, reading from his new translation of the love elegies of Ibn al-'Arabi. (5 Union Sq. W. 691-6590.) ♦ March 3 at 2: Marilyn Chin reads from her poetry. (Wave Hill, 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. 718-549-3200, ext. 308.)

TALKS
Feb. 28 at 6: The artists Eric Fischl and Lisa Yuskavage join the curators Debra Balken and Isabelle Dervaux and others for a discussion about the state of modern architecture. (National Academy of Design School of Fine Arts, 5 E. 89th St. 369-4880.) ♦ Feb. 28 at 7: Jim Rygiel, the visual-effects supervisor for "The Lord of the Rings," screens behind-the-scenes footage from the making of the film and talks about plans for the trilogy. (DGA Theatre, 110 W. 57th St. For more information, call 718-784-4520.) ♦ March 5 at 6: Dr. Patch Adams, the subject of the 1998 Robin Williams movie, discusses ways to improve the collective bedside manner of the health-care system. (Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. For more information, call 817-8215.)

N. ASCENCIOS

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MOVIES OPENING

BORSTAL BOY
The story of an Irish Republican youth (Shawn Hatosy) imprisoned in an English reform institution during the Second World War. Based on the memoir by Brendan Behan and directed by Peter Sheridan. Opening March 1. (Quad Cinema.)

ESTHER KAHN
In a drama directed and co-written by Arnaud Desplechin, Summer Phoenix plays a Jewish seamstress in nineteenth-century London struggling to become an actress. Opening March 1. (Cinema Village.)

40 DAYS AND 40 NIGHTS
Michael Lehmann ("Heathers") directed this comedy about a brokenhearted guy (Josh Hartnett) who takes a vow of celibacy for Lent, during which he meets his dream girl (Shannyn Sossamon). Opening March 1.

RAM DASS FIERCE GRACE
A documentary about Richard Alpert, the Harvard psychology professor who became a New Age guru. Mickey Lemle directed. Opening Feb. 27. (Film Forum.)

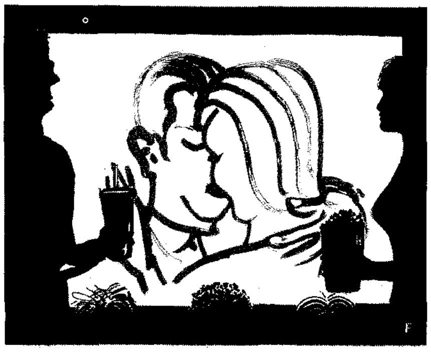
TROUBLE EVERY DAY
Claire Denis's new film, in which an American man (Vincent Gallo) and a Parisian woman (Béatrice Dalle) suffer from a cerebral impairment that turns them into cannibals. In French. Opening March 1.

WE WERE SOLDIERS
A military drama with Mel Gibson as Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore, who led U.S. soldiers in the battle of Ia Drang, one of the first major conflicts of the Vietnam War. The cast includes Barry Pepper, Greg Kinnear, and Chris Klein. Directed by Randall Wallace. Opening March 1.

FILM NOTES

AMÉLIE
A waifish Parisienne discovers her mission in life: to bring unexpected happiness to others, and so to herself. Such is the story of Amélie (Audrey Tautou), and the simplicity of it—not to mention its dangerous surfeit of sweetness—appears to have touched a universal nerve. (In truth, the saga of the movie's success is more telling than anything in the movie itself.) Tautou is clearly a find, although one wonders what Mathieu Kassovitz, who plays the object of her affection, made of his role; it was Kassovitz who, in 1995, yanked French cinema up to date with his baring of ethnic hostilities in "La Haine." The Paris of this new movie lies at the other extreme, although what nags at you most is not the neighborly charm but the itchy, unsettled manner of the director, Jean-Pierre Jeunet. How far should we trust a plea for benevolence when it feels like a box of tricks? In French.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/5/01.) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and 34th Street Theatre.)

A BEAUTIFUL MIND
If you think the title stinks, try the movie. Russell Crowe plays John Nash, a real-life mathematician whose most radical work was produced in his early twenties and who shared the 1994 Nobel Prize for Economics at the age of sixty-six. In between lay years of darkness, during which Nash was assailed by paranoid schizophrenia. When it comes to the delicate matter of his delusions, this earnest movie, written by Akiva Goldsman and directed by Ron Howard, pulls a flagrant scam: whole characters and episodes are presented as urgently authentic, only to be revealed as figments of a cracked imagination. Crowe pulls out the stops, but he looks too bullish and controlled for such a pitiable victim. The movie grinds on forever until it bumps into redemption; the best reason to stay with it is Jennifer Connelly, who smolders and suffers to perfection as Nash's weary wife. Math skills not required.—*A.L.* (1/7/02) (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)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BLACK HAWK DOWN
This account of the ill-fated 1993 Special Forces action in Mogadishu, Somalia, which resulted in the death of eighteen Americans, is exceptionally violent but also truthful to the pain and disorder of battle. It's very clearly directed by Ridley Scott, who allows you to see where the different groups of men are fighting in relation to one another. The movie suggests that despite the casualties the battle was not a total failure but rather a demonstration of strength—the men were killed, in part, because they stayed in the danger zone to rescue survivors from the two helicopters that were shot down. With Sam Shepard, Tom Sizemore, and Josh Hartnett, all submerging themselves in the business at hand. Ken Nolan, adapting Mark Bowden's book, achieves the right tone of matter-of-factness, resolution, and defiance.—*David Denby* (12/24 & 31/01) (Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

COLLATERAL DAMAGE
After his family is killed in a terrorist attack, Arnold Schwarzenegger goes off by himself to the Colombian jungle to find the killer. Andrew Davis's new thriller offers little more than an absurd plot strung between explosions. The movie's physical virtuosity is meaningless—you've seen it before. With Elias Koteas as a ruthless C.I.A. man, Francesca Neri and Cliff Curtis as the Colombians, and John Turturro and John Leguizamo, wandering about in small, unfathomable roles.—*D.D.* (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

CROSSROADS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

EXECUTIVE SUITE
Robert Wise turns the scramble to take over the top job at a furniture company into a white-collar meltdown of Enron-ian proportions in this stolidly gripping 1954 tale of a heroic engineer (William Holden) defending all-American craftsmanship from the corrupting influence of Wall Street. When Holden lifts a chair in his two hands and rips it apart to illustrate the shoddiness of his company's latest product line, the act carries the clout of a fatal rifle shot in a Western.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Rose Cinemas; March 1.)

FORCE OF EVIL
Like much of the work of its writer-director, Abraham Polonsky, this 1948 compact film noir boasts elements of anticapitalist parable and Odetsian street poetry. The movie's partisans have described the main character, a hot-shot Mob lawyer (John Garfield), both as a man awakening to family and community and as a disintegrated cog in an infernal machine; that contradiction owes less to any rich ambiguity in the material than to its untamed volatility. Polonsky loves confrontations that flare out quickly; they lead to soft-boiled moral summations. Still, the gritty location photography by George Barnes, the odd, lyrical stridency of David Raksin's score, and the overreaching push of Polonsky's script give the movie a memorable patina. It suggests possibilities for a tradition of American social melodrama that were lost when filmmakers like Polonsky fell victim to the blacklist.—*M.S.* (Moving Image; March 3.)

GOSFORD PARK
This Agatha Christie-style houseparty murder mystery, set in 1932, plants itself deep into social reality and achieves the kind of candor about class and sex that Christie would never have been capable of. The brilliant screenplay was written by Julian Fellowes. Robert Altman directs an enormous cast with lightness and speed and a masterly ability to pull the many little pieces of intrigue together into a coherent whole. Casually, the movie chronicles the end of the rigid British class system and the liberation of the working class through popular entertainment. The once-in-a-lifetime cast includes Michael Gambon, Kristin Scott Thomas, Maggie Smith, Jeremy Northam, and Charles Dance as the swells, and Helen Mirren, Eileen Atkins, Alan Bates, Clive Owen, and Emily Watson as the servants.—*D.D.* (1/14/02) (Chelsea West, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

IN THE BEDROOM
In Camden, Maine, a twenty-one-year-old college student, Frank (Nick Stahl), is having a headlong summer affair with a local woman, Natalie (Marisa Tomei). Natalie is separated from her husband (William Mapother), the loutish scion of a prominent local family. When the husband kills his rival, Frank's hypercivilized parents (Tom Wilkinson and Sissy Spacek) begin to consider vengeance as a way of saving themselves from destroying each other. This Sophoclean tale, fleshed out from an elliptical short story by Andre Dubus, draws its strength from minute observation of settings and moods, and from a gradual tightening of the winch. Much of it is very quiet (the first-time director, Todd Field, is an actor and a photographer), but when it explodes, the violence actually means something.—*D.D.* (11/26/01) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea West, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Metro Twin, and 34th Street Theatre.)

ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS
Another one of those Dogme '95 films that purport to give the viewer an authentic you-are-there-experience. Three couples travel together to Venice, a minimum of complications ensue, and, fortunately, the director Lone Scherfig doesn't have much to say. She gets credit, though, for making the least dogmatic of all the Dogme films. In Danish and Italian.—*Bruce Diones* (Angelika Film Center, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and New York Twin.)

JOHN Q
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Cinema I, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

LAST ORDERS
A gang of three Englishmen, in various states of decline, gather to mourn a fourth, an East London butcher and veteran of the Second World War. Fred Schepisi's careful movie, adapted from Graham Swift's prize-winning novel, has a tricky, deck-shuffling structure, with past and present chopping repeatedly into one another; you may warm to this layering, though you could also argue that Schepisi is trying too hard to deepen a dangerously simple tale. The issue here is a friendship that survives the dwindling of a nation; we pass from an England proudly at war to the weary confines of a pub. The pals are played by David Hemmings, Tom Courtenay, Bob Hoskins, and, filling the dead man's shoes, Michael Caine. Some of their backchat has an oddly studied air—what would the film have felt like if Schepisi had allowed them to improvise? With Helen Mirren as the non-merry widow, and the unabashed Kelly Reilly as her younger self.—*A.L.* (2/18 & 25/02) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

THE LEOPARD
It had been cut to two hours and forty-one minutes when it opened in this country, in 1953, in a dubbed-

into-English version that didn't always seem in synch. The new version, not released here until September, 1983, is in Italian, with subtitles, and at its full length—three hours and five minutes. And it's magnificent—a sweeping popular epic, with obvious similarities to "Gone with the Wind," and with an almost Chekhovian sensibility. The film has a hero on a grand scale—Don Fabrizio, Prince of Salina, played superlatively by Burt Lancaster, who has acknowledged that he modelled his performance on the nobleman director, Luchino Visconti. The film is set in the eighteen-sixties, when Italy was in the middle of a revolution, but it's essentially about the Prince himself—the aging Leopard—and how he reacts to the social changes. We couldn't be any closer to Lancaster's Prince if we were inside his skin—which in a way we are. We see what he sees, feel what he feels, and, in the last hour, set at a splendid ball that marks the aristocrats' acceptance of the Mafia-dominated parvenus who are taking over their wealth and power, we're inside his mind as he relives his life, experiences regret, and accepts the dying of his class and his own death. It's one of the greatest of all passages in movies.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; March 5.)

LOVE AFFAIR

With Charles Boyer as the international playboy who falls hard for a headstrong American (Irene Dunne) on a voyage to New York, Leo McCarey's 1939 comedy-cum-tearjerker is a classic—the prototype of the "You'll laugh! You'll cry!" kind of movie. While the two weigh their shipboard romance against the prosaic love-mates who await them in Gotham, they conjure a beguiling blend of suavity and fervor. The film careers into melodrama when the two disembark, planning to meet six months later at the top of the Empire State Building. But McCarey builds to his heart-tug climax with a kitschy daring: the director and his stars never lose their conviction, and the final scene is a genuine emotional twister.—*M.S.* (Moving Image; March 2.)

MONSOON WEDDING

Mira Nair's new picture has been hailed as a feel-good spree, but it's better than that—a barely stable compound of the wounding, the confusing, and the appealing. The action takes place in Delhi, where a pair of middle-class parents (Lillete Dubey and Naseeruddin Shah) work themselves into a froth over the nuptials of their daughter (Vasundhara Das). Her marriage is, of course, arranged; for all the racket and buzz of the film's modernity, it finds time to make the suggestion—bewildering, perhaps, to audiences here—that from this archaic arrangement can spring an enduring love. The groom is flying in from Houston, Texas; another relative travels from Australia, and you brace yourself for the cultural collisions. The result is a comedy, but only just. India's stressful poise between orthodoxy and innovation (listen for the clash of peacock and cell phone) leads to a devastating family fracture that is only half-healed by the celebrations at the end. In English and Hindi, sometimes within a single conversation.—*A.L.* (2/18 & 25/02) (Paris.)

MONSTER'S BALL

Marc Forster's movie delivers an unworkable paradox: the characters are inarticulate, damaged people who have led heedless and tragic lives—portrayed with bitter realism—and yet the plotting is sheer Hollywood in its schemes and coincidences. Billy Bob Thornton is the Georgia corrections officer who conducts the execution of the husband (Sean "P. Diddy" Combs) of a local waitress (Halle Berry) and then falls in love with the widow. The slow, reticent dramaturgy has its moments of authenticity, especially in the balanced interracial romance: Thornton is quiet and affecting and Berry acts up a storm.—*D.D.* (Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS

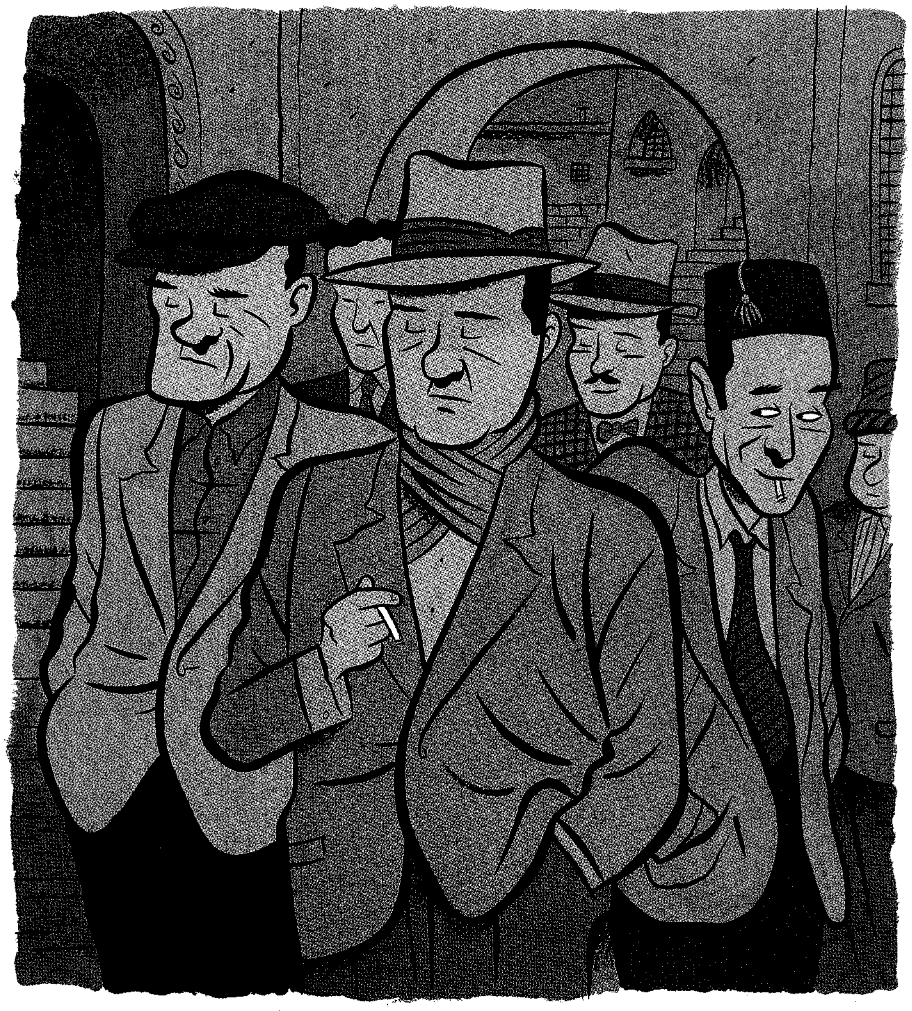
After the brilliance of "Rushmore," his level-headed look at the gifts of a misfit, where could Wes Anderson go next? In the event, he has broadened his scope to take in an entire family of misfits: the Tenenbaums, residing in their colorful town house like kooky modern leftovers from the age of Edith Wharton. The parents (Gene Hackman and Anjelica Huston) raised three overachieving children (Ben Stiller, Luke Wilson, and Gwyneth Paltrow) and then separated. The movie, which documents the aftermath, is packed tight with strong, if baffled, feelings, and yet we could be watching it through glass; Anderson specializes in the cool, astringent gaze, and for anyone sick of Hollywood heart-melters this could be the antidote.—*A.L.* (12/17/01) (East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

SCRATCH

It started simply enough: in 1975, Theodore Livingston (a.k.a. GrandWizzard Theodore) was playing music in his Bronx River Houses apartment when his mom yelled at him to turn it down; he grabbed the record with his hand and heard a scratchy noise that sounded kind of cool. Starting from this mythic zero hour, Doug Pray's enthusiastic homage to d.j.s follows the evolution of scratching from an accident to an art form. In its current state, scratching requires an absurd dexterity and a love for mind-melting sonic distortions. One practitioner, Mix Master Mike, tells of a night when he was so freaked out by the sounds emanating from his turntables that he believed he was communicating with intergalactic beings. His story, along with those of other influential turntablists, makes for a rough-sketch history of a style that's now being co-opted by footwear and soft-drink ads. Arriving at this time of relative obscurity for the movement, "Scratch" is one of those prescient social documents like Charlie Ahearn's 1982 "Wild Style," which caught hip-hop in its block-rocking infancy.—*Michael Agger* (Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.)

THE SON'S ROOM

The Italian director Nanni Moretti has delved into his darkest material to date and come up with his best film; even here, amazing to report, his customary lightness of touch has not deserted him. Moretti himself stars as a psychiatrist, Giovanni, who is married to the calm and adoring Paola (Laura Morante). They have two children (Jasmine Trinca and Giuseppe Sanfelice), one of whom dies, taking with him the dream of a happy family. Moretti's pacing is hard to fault, as he follows the hairline cracks that widen into gulfs and leave the household looking isolated and loveless. As a case study, the movie adds little to the archives of grief, and rightly so; Moretti is simply drawing up his own distinctively colored map of familiar terrain. In its sharp-etched way, this is no less comic than Moretti's other work, and, for all its sophistication, the comedy is of the primitive kind—that of continuing to live (to jog, to cook, to go to school) when the reason to live has fallen from your hands. In Italian.—*A.L.* (2/4/02) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)



ROCK THE CASBAH *The 1937 French thriller "Pépé Le Moko," which was little seen in the United States because Hollywood swiftly remade it as "Algiers," features Jean Gabin in his robust glory as a master thief with a telltale heart. He lords it over the perilous demimonde of Algiers while yearning, fatally, for a knockout Parisienne (Mireille Balin) and the City of Light itself. The movie (opening March 1 at Film Forum) is the director Julien Duvivier's masterpiece, blending electric documentary images with bravura sequences in a style akin to operatic verismo.—Michael Sragow*

STORYTELLING
Another disturbance of the peace from the writer-director Todd Solondz, who made "Welcome to the Dollhouse" and "Happiness." This time, we get a movie split in half, the first part of which concerns a creative-writing student (Selma Blair), thin and white, who dumps her disabled boyfriend and, for good measure, sleeps with her black professor. In the second half, we trace the exploits of a documentary filmmaker (Paul Giamatti) who wants to unearth what the youth of today are doing with themselves in high school. The answer is, more or less, nothing, although we do come across one slacker who would like to be on TV. In short, Solondz presents two tales meant to winkle out the cultural encounters that embarrass us the most, and then twists the knife and leaves us squirming harder than before. It's clever enough, and you could gash yourself on some of the lines, but, when a director is as resolutely ungenerous as Solondz, the end can only come as a relief.—*A.L.* (2/4/02) (Angelika Film Center and BAM Rose Cinemas.)

WHERE THE HEART IS
In this wizardly 1990 New York City comedy-drama, the director John Boorman, who cowrote the script with his daughter Telsche, takes a battling family out of "King Lear" and turns them into characters from "The Tempest." Dabney Coleman plays the Lear figure, a choleric demolitions expert; his daughters (Suzy Amis and Uma Thurman) and his son (David Hewlett) have been sponging off him all their lives. When protests preclude him from destroying a quaint, unexceptional old building in Brooklyn, he dumps his offspring there to save them from their own complacency and pretension. It becomes a magical mystery home, even for the homeless. With Amis, an art student, leading the way, the children, their friends, and their parents find happiness through aesthetic sorcery and other kinds of alchemy and craftiness. The superb cast includes Joanna Cassidy, Crispin Glover, and Christopher Plummer as an indigent magician and ballroom dancer; he's part Merlin, part Arthur Murray.—*M.S.* (Moving Image; March 2.)

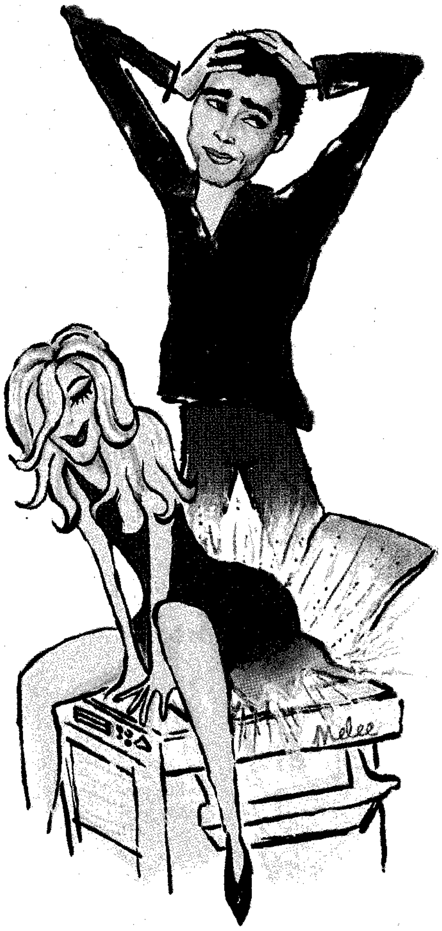
ALSO PLAYING

BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF
Empire 25 and Union Square.
THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO
Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.
DONNIE DARKO
Pioneer.
IRIS
Lincoln Square and Union Square.
LANTANA
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING (12/24 & 31/01)
Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.
MARYAM
Angelika Film Center.
MULHOLLAND DRIVE (10/15/01)
Cinema Village and Empire 25.
TRAINING DAY
Empire 25 and Village Theatre VII.
WHAT TIME IS IT THERE?
Cinema Village.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.



Josh Hartnett and Monet Mazur in "40 Days and 40 Nights."

The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through March 31: "New York, New York," films selected by the New York Film Critics Circle. March 2 at 2: "Love Affair" (†). ♦ March 2 at 4: "Where the Heart Is" (†). ♦ March 3 at 2: "Force of Evil" (†). ♦ March 3 at 4: "Pickup on South Street" (1953, Samuel Fuller). ♦ Repertory night. March 2-3 at 6:30: "Death in Venice" (1971, Luchino Visconti; in Italian).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Through March 3: "The Wide World of Werner." Unless otherwise noted, all films are in German and directed by Werner Herzog. Feb. 28 at 7, March 1 at 9, March 2 at 7, and March 3 at 6: "Last Words" (1967), "Precautions Against Fanatics" (1969), and "How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck?" (1976). ♦ Feb. 28 at 9, March 2 at 5, and March 5 at 8: "Land of Silence and Darkness" (1971). ♦ March 1 at 7, March 2 at 9, and March 3 at 4: "I Am My Films: A Portrait of Werner Herzog" (1978, Christian Weisenborn and Erwin Keusch).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Feb. 27 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Irma Vep" (1996, Olivier Assayas; in French). ♦ Feb. 28 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Late August, Early September" (1998, Assayas; in French). ♦ March 1 at 2, 4:30, 6:50 and 9:10: "Executive Suite" (†). ♦ March 2 at 2, 5:30, and 9: "Citizen Kane" (1941, Orson Welles). ♦ March 3 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "They Live by Night" (1948, Nicholas Ray). ♦ A tribute to Pauline Kael. March 4 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Pennies from Heaven" (1981, Herbert Ross). The critic Stephanie Zacharek will introduce the 6:50 screening. ♦ March 5 at 7: "The Leopard" (†).

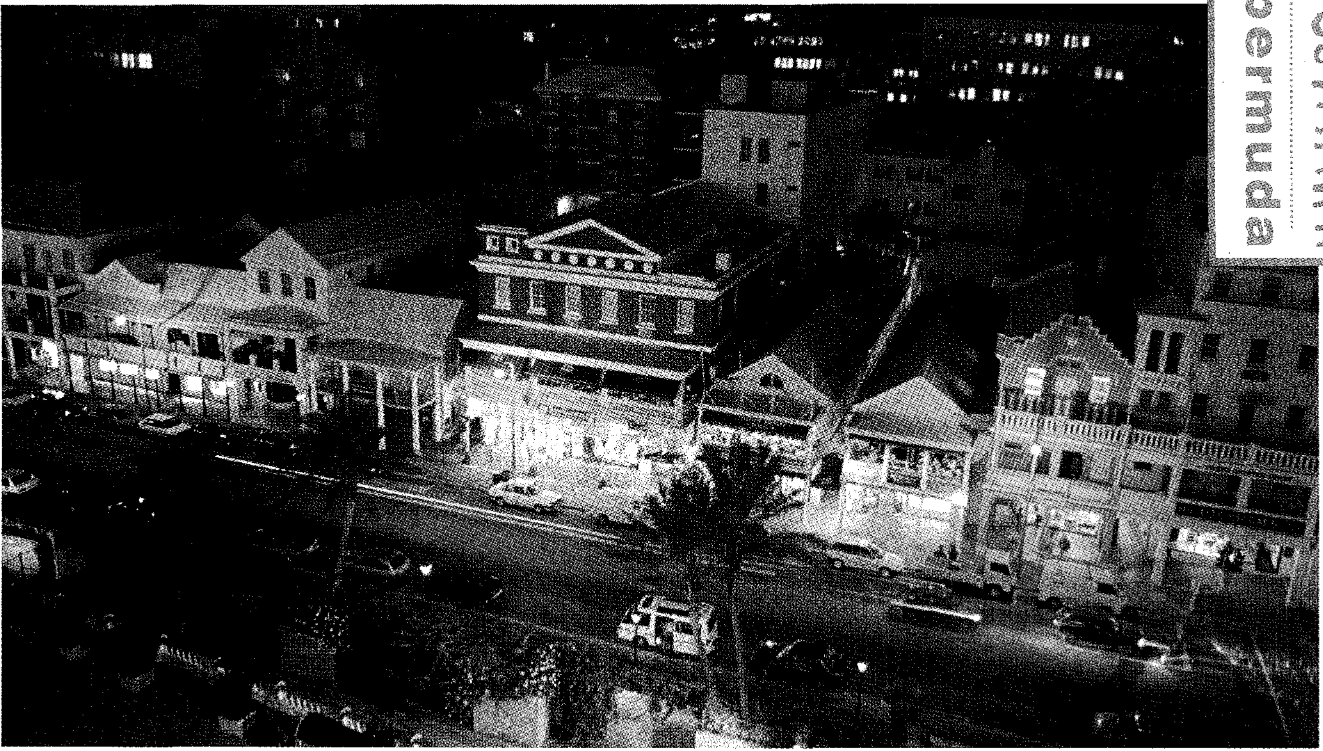
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Feb. 27-28 at 1, 2:45, 4:30, 6:15, 8, and 9:45: A restored print of Vittorio De Sica's "Umberto D." (1952; in Italian). ♦ Starting March 1: "Pépé Le Moko" (1937, Julien Duvivier; in French).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Films that portray *la vie d'artiste*. March 5 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Mina Tannenbaum" (1994, Martine Dugowson; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through April 30: "The First Decade: Video from the EAI Archives," selected video art from the collection of Electronic Arts Intermix. See www.moma.org for complete details. ♦ Films from Africa. March 1 at 8: "Sambizanga" (1972, Sarah Maldoror; in Portuguese). ♦ March 2-3: Screenings of Academy-nominated documentary films.

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through Feb. 15: "*Film Comment* Selects: The Best Unseen Films of 2001." Feb. 27 at 1:30 and Feb. 28 at 3:30: "Ichi the Killer" (2001, Takeshi Miike; in Japanese). ♦ Feb. 27 at 4 and Feb. 28 at 1:30: "Harmful Insect" (2001, Akihiko Shiota; in Japanese). ♦ Starting March 1: "Taking No Prisoners: The Films of Sergio Bianchi." All films are in Portuguese. March 1 at 5 and March 3 at 2: "The Secret Cause" (1994). ♦ March 1 at 3 and 7, March 2 at 3:30 and 8, and March 5 at 3 and 7: "Chronically Unfeasible" (2000). ♦ March 1 at 1, March 2 at 5:45, and March 5 at 1, 5, and 9: "Romance" (1987). ♦ March 1 at 9:15, March 2 at 2, and March 3 at 4: "Should I Kill Them?" (1982) and "Divine Social Service" (1983).

ROBERT MELEE



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BERMUDA BENEFITS
The Bermuda International Film Festival showcases not only some of the world's best films, but also the island's pristine beaches and the incomparable shopping of Hamilton's Front Street.

ready for its closeup

BY CHRIS GIBBONS

The Bermuda International Film Festival (April 12-18) is not big on glamour. While celebrity sightings have been something of a tradition here—the island having played discreet host to the likes of Mark Twain, Eugene O'Neill, Nöel Coward, and John Lennon over the years—Bermudians are disinclined to make a fuss.

BIFF (the festival's punchy acronym) is big on being small and intimate—on a twenty-one-square-mile island it could hardly be anything else. You won't find red carpets and roped-off areas bristling with paparazzi, but a relaxed, unhurried atmosphere in which to sip an espresso or a Dark 'n Stormy (a deceptively smooth Gosling's Black Seal rum and ginger beer concoction) and chat with filmmakers at free lunchtime discussions or lively post-screening Q&A's.

British director Paul Hills has called it "the best little film festival in the world." American filmmaker Kalman Apple, whose "Speed For Thespians" was a selected short last year, loves the audience interaction. "It's great to have audiences that are truly excited about seeing films. Sometimes you get invited to somewhere like New Orleans which sounds like a fun place to go, but only ten people come to see your movie."

Bermuda is as sophisticated and cosmopolitan as the films on display—and the festival is a big hit with a growing number of international attendees. Bermudians like a good party too, and everyone's invited to the Wrap Party awards (April 18th). BIFF may be small (with no multiplex theatres, festival films are shown at three of the island's four cinemas), but it's big in scope and quality. "We like to think of it as an international meeting place for film," says Aideen Ratteray Pryse, BIFF's cofounder and full-time director. "Here you can travel the world through film and we try and make our program as international as possible."

The fifth edition of the festival will have critic Rex Reed sitting on its jury. Reed and company will have their work cut out for them: they'll have to pick the best films of those selected from hundreds worldwide. Last year's lineup included forty-nine features, shorts, and documentaries from twenty countries. Winning entries came from the United States, Sweden, India, and Africa's Burkina Faso. Keeping its international directive, this year's festival will have a showcase of Australian films.

Director John Madden ("Shakespeare In Love") was honored last year in a Tribute to Excellence in Film during which he received the festival's first Prospero Award. (The award gives a nod to Shakespeare's "The Tempest," a play inspired by the 1609 shipwreck whose survivors were Bermuda's first inhabitants.) Eventually, the Sea Venture's survivors built another ship, the Deliverance, to complete their journey to Jamestown, Virginia. In between screenings you can visit a replica of it in St. George's. The part of St. George's referred to as olde towne is the oldest continually inhabited town of English origin in the Western Hemisphere. It's also the nation's first capital, with historic forts and winding alleyways. In 2000, UNESCO declared St. George's a World Heritage Site.

At the other end of the island is the Royal Naval Dockyard, once a bastion of the British Empire's defenses, now an impressive setting for shops, restaurants, the Bermuda Maritime Museum, and the extensively restored Commissioner's House. In between are miles of unspoiled beaches washed by a warm crystal-clear ocean; eight golf courses; myriads of coves, reefs, and wrecks to explore; tennis courts; horse-riding trails; and world-class fishing.

April is also one of the best times to visit Bermuda. Temperatures are in the eighties, and soft, fragrant breezes waft up from the south. Experience the island's finest at this year's BIFF—cool breezes, unruffled atmosphere, and the world's best films.

Chris Gibbons is a Bermuda-based writer and editor who has lived and worked on the island for nineteen years.

For information about the Bermuda International Film Festival, call 800-BERMUDA or visit www.bermudatourism.com or www.bermudafilmfest.com.

COMING SOON: WORLD FILM

A South African film about racial reconciliation, a slick Australian thriller, and two award-winning documentaries screened at the Sundance Film Festival are among some twenty-five feature films selected for screening at this year's fifth Bermuda International Film Festival.

"Malunde," by director Stefanie Sycholt, tells the story of a cross-country drive by a hardened former military man and a young boy whose mother was imprisoned for her membership in the African National Congress. Its lead actors Ian Roberts and Kagiso Mtetwa shared the Best Actor prize at AVANTI (the South African film awards), while the film also won Best Picture and Best Director.

"The Bank," by Australian director Robert Connolly, is about a computer expert who claims he can predict the next stock market crash. It is part of BIFF's eight-film Australian showcase.

"Daughter from Danang," by directors Gail Dolgin and Vicente Franco, won the Grand Jury Prize for a documentary at the Sundance festival in January. "Danang" chronicles the reunion of a Vietnamese mother and her Amerasian daughter after a twenty-two year separation.

"Blue Vinyl" directors, Judith Helfand and Daniel B. Gold, have fashioned what the festival committee calls "a fast-paced and toxic tale about home, family, and industry-sponsored science." Helfand won a Peabody Award for the documentary, "A Healthy Baby Girl." Gold's camera work earned him the Excellence in Cinematography award in the documentary category at Sundance.

Other festival selections confirmed at press time are: "Hotel" by acclaimed British director Mike Figgis; Toronto International Film Festival opener "Last Wedding," directed by Canadian Bruce Sweeney; the British occult thriller "Revelation" directed by Stuart Urban and starring Terence Stamp; and "No Turning Back," an American-Spanish coproduction that has won six festival awards worldwide.

GETTING THERE

The Bermuda International Film Festival has partnered with four of the island's finest hotels—the Elbow Beach Hotel, Fairmont Hamilton Princess, Stonington Beach Hotel and White Sands & Cottages—to provide special festival packages. The packages (available from www.BermudaEscapes.com) include airfare, three nights accommodation, three BIFF film tickets, and an invitation to either the Opening Night Gala or Wrap Party. Packages (per person, double occupancy including taxes and gratuities) start at $1,111 from New York, $1,061 from Boston, and $1,186 from Philadelphia. The concierge at www.BermudaEscapes.com can also arrange custom packages that include golf tee times, spa treatments, restaurant reservations—even a private jet.

It's like a great dream. You're at this intimate film festival that just happens to be in beautiful Bermuda. You're wearing a surfer shirt, drinking rum and chatting with a hot indie director, when... BEEP! Your cell goes and the dream is lost forever...

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THE
NEW YORKER

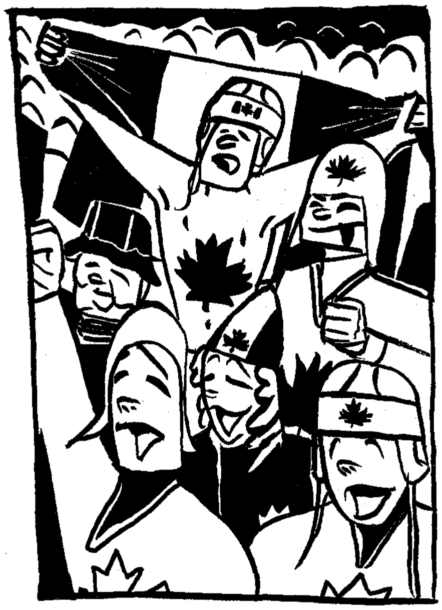
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
BLAME CANADA

The Canadians may not have broken many records at the Salt Lake City Olympics, but they did do something more difficult: they smashed their national image. As everybody knows by now, the Canadian pairs ice-skating team of Jamie Salé and David Pelletier outskated the Russian team but were awarded the silver medal because a French judge threw her vote. Those of us with a weakness for French women—and certainly the most unforgettable figure of these Games was that skater in the Coke commercial who murmured, ravishingly, "*mon coeur*"—recall that in France a judge can also be an investigator, and is *supposed* to have arbitrary opinions. Nevertheless, the Canadians screamed bloody murder and demanded an inquiry and, mirabile dictu, Salé and Pelletier got the gold medal, although the Russians were allowed to keep theirs, too.

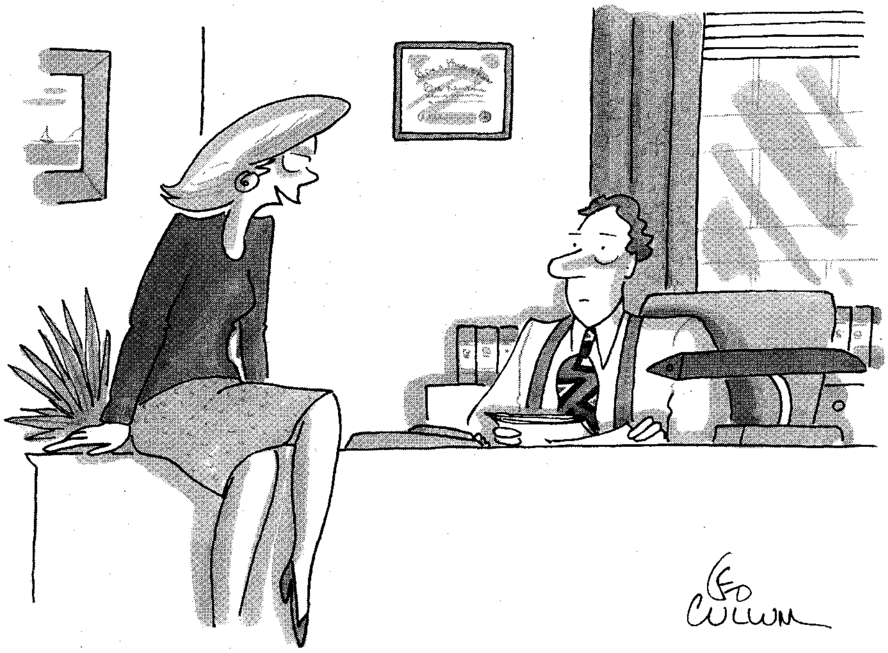
It is difficult for non-Canadians to grasp just how vast a change this is. The skaters didn't like what happened to them, they kicked and yelled, and then something better happened to them. Many American stories could be summed up in that sentence, but for Canada, a country with a whole arsenal of shrugs and apologies and "What's wrong with a silver, son?" explanations, that discovery was like the physicist Richard Feynman's discovery about sex: you mean, you just ask for it? Just to ask requires an accumulation of unembarrassed insolence that is known in America as cool. Canadians have often been cold, but not, Pierre Trudeau aside, cool.

Most national institutions in Canada were designed for the reduction of conflict. The Mounties are there in their bright-red uniforms to say, "Shoot if you want, we'd rather talk." Canada has a house of Parliament, the Senate, whose primary purpose is to amiably accomplish nothing, and to be seen accomplishing it. Canadian sports was, for many years, marked by having two football teams with the same name. Often enough, the Grey Cup, which is like the Super Bowl minus the money and the Britney Spears commercials, featured the Roughriders vs. the Rough Riders, so no one could be disappointed. It was instructive to watch the Canadian pair as they skated the line between the traditional oh-well-ism and the new have-it-your-way-ism. It was clear, for instance, that Salé, the Alberta girl of the bright smile and the shimmying rear, was the American of the pair. She wept, she grimaced, she could barely keep herself in check. Meanwhile, Pelletier, a tall Quebec lad, maintained a more traditional demeanor of ironic detachment. (When they did get their gold, he said, "I do hope we get the bronze, too, so we can get the entire collection.") The American television hosts kept saying that the delayed win was the best thing that could possibly have happened to the skaters, because it upped their price. Salé looked like she was with that program; Pelletier looked unsure.



There appears to be no end to the new kick-ass Canucks. It was a White House speechwriter from Toronto, David Frum, who coined the phrase "axis of evil" and fed it to his boss—at least according to Frum's wife, fellow-Torontonian Danielle Crittenden, who un-Canadianly *boasted* about it in e-mails. The normally impeccably Canadian Wayne Gretzky, the general manager of the Canadian Olympic hockey team, publicly groused about European Canada-haters. Canada may now force a recut of "Saving Private Ryan" in which you see that, while the Americans

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



"You know how to whistle, don't you? Just pick up the phone and call the S.E.C."

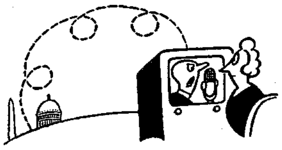
• •

were heroically screwing up on Omaha Beach, the Canadians were conquering their beach with a minimum of fuss and casualties. They might even demand that every American film in which the sterile streets of Toronto appear as New York fess up and—well, come clean.

The New North seems so insolent, in fact, that some Americans already think things are getting out of hand. (By week's end, Russia and South Korea, nursing their own grievances, had gone Canadian and challenged the Olympic officials, too.) The online *Weekly Standard*, which is not usually hostile to unilateral action, lectured the Canadians on the importance of not letting short-term rage run away with the long-term good. The *Standard* recommended that "Canadians should swallow hard, keep the silver, and use their bully pulpit to shame the sport into reforming the way it's officiated. It's not fair and it's not right, but it would be the noble thing to do." This may be just the beginning of a backlash against the New North, keyed, it seems, to a single alarming thought: what would happen if everybody in the world demanded to have it their way whenever they were really, really sure that they were right? As an anxious American reflection, it had an almost vintage Canadian feeling.

—*Adam Gopnik*

WEST WING WATCH
SNOOKERED BY BUSH



In America, we don't have shadow cabinets or governments-in-waiting. What we have instead is "The West Wing," NBC's drama about a White House staff that, compared with the Bush White House, has bigger offices, better haircuts, more Democrats, and many, many more people eager to filibuster about policy as they walk down the hall looking for coffee. As the show's creator and writer, Aaron Sorkin is essentially the country's loyal opposition. And in that role he has some questions.

The first point Sorkin raised, speaking last week from his quarters at the Four Seasons in Los Angeles, where he was writing another episode of the show, is that something has gone awry in the media's representation of the President. "President Bush seems to be handling things very well, and I support him one hundred per cent," Sorkin said. "I also think it's absolutely right that at this time we're all laying off the bubblehead jokes. But that's a far cry from what the *Times* and CNN and others on whom we rely for unvarnished objectivity are telling us, which is that"—his voice took on a worshipful tone—" 'My God! On September 12th he woke up as Teddy Roosevelt! He became the Rough Rider!' "

Among these hagiographies, Sorkin said, was NBC's look at a day in the life of the Presidency, "The Bush White House: Inside the Real West Wing," which aired as the lead-in to a "West Wing" repeat a few weeks ago. "The White House pumped up the President's schedule to show him being much busier and more engaged than he is, and Tom Brokaw let it happen—the show was a valentine to Bush. That illusion may be what we need right now, but the truth is we're simply pretending to believe that Bush exhibited unspeakable courage at the World Series by throwing out the first pitch at Yankee Stadium, or that he, by God, showed those terrorists by going to Salt Lake City and jumbling the first line of the Olympic opening ceremony. The media is waving pom-poms, and the entire country is being polite."

A more accurate perspective, Sorkin suggested, can be seen in a forthcoming documentary by Alexandra Pelosi called "Journeys with George." "It's about life on Bush's campaign plane, and the White House is worried about it because it shows the President in an amateurish light." (In one scene, as members of the press mix Margaritas Bush wades into the throng, announcing that "it takes an animal to know an animal.") "And I just began reading Frank Bruni's campaign book," Sorkin continued, referring to the *Times* reporter's "Ambling Into History: The Unlikely Odyssey of George W. Bush," "which begins with Candidate Bush at a service in Texas for seven people who were killed in a church by a crazy gunman. Bruni describes Bush making goofy faces at the press, and it reminds you of a junior high schooler on a museum field trip."

In the semi-contemporaneous universe of "The West Wing," where the World Trade Center never fell but terrorism is now a top staff priority, President Josiah Bartlet is up for reëlection this November. "Bartlet is going to be running against Governor Robert Ritchie, of Florida, who's not the sharpest tool in the box but who's raised a lot of money and is very popular with the Republican Party," Sorkin said. If this sounds familiar, it should. "It was frustrating watching Gore try so hard not to appear smart in the debates—why not just say 'Here's my fucking résumé, what do you got?' We're a completely fictional, nonpolitical show, but one of our motors is doing our version of the old *Mad* magazine 'Scenes We'd Like to See.' And so to an extent we're going to rerun the last election and try a few different plays than the Gore campaign did. In the episode this Wednesday, Toby Ziegler"—Bartlet's communications director, and the conscience of Sorkin's White House—"is going to continue his conversation with the President, 'Your father hated your guts because you were smarter than he was. In fact, he hit you because of it, and as a result you are scared to get people mad at you with your brains. You don't want to lose as the smartest kid in class who's running against an everyman. But I'm telling you, be the smartest kid in your class. Be the reason why your father hated you. Make this an election about smart and stupid, about engaged and not, qualified and not.' "

Sorkin acknowledged, however, that even after a "very successful State of the Union speech, President Bartlet's approval rating is hovering around sixty per cent." Meanwhile, of course, President Bush's approval rating has been in the low eighties. "To put Bartlet in the eighties," Sorkin said, "I'd have to send the country to war, and that's not going to happen. At least," he added carefully, mindful that his own approval ratings—the Nielsens—can also compel policy changes, "not this week."

—*Tad Friend*

THE BOARDS
ENTER MR. GOLDWYN

Alan King, the legendary standup comedian and actor, was in his second-floor dressing room the other morning at upper Broadway's cozy Promenade Theatre, where he was about to start rehearsing a new play, "Mr. Goldwyn," in which he takes on the title role of the legendary movie producer known for his stubborn independence as well as for his malapropisms ("Keep a stiff upper chin," "Include me out," "A verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's written on," etc.).

"I made this place!" King said as he stretched his arms out commandingly toward his accommodations. "I was my own decorator. Look. Posters from my movies, including 'Night and the City' that I made with Bob De Niro. My family photos—my wife, my children, my grandchildren."

He patted a nearby clothes rack, hung with elegant, beautifully pressed clothing on hangers spaced uniformly, with mathematical precision. "My Sam Goldwyn suits and stuff," King said. "The way that man dressed! Only in the best! With nothing in the pockets. No wallet, no keys. He didn't want to ruin the line of the suit. Everything perfect, the Sam Goldwyn way. Of all those great movie moguls, Goldwyn—the only one of them who owned his own studio till the day he died—cared the most about how he looked," King said. "He was firm, barrel-chested, with a rigid jaw, strong." King assumed perfect posture, his face chiselled, looking firm, barrel-chested, with a rigid jaw, and strong.

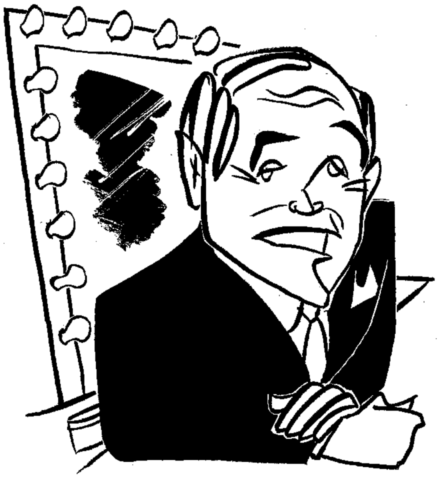
He was called to the rehearsal and headed for a door leading into the theatre. "When they said they wanted me to play Sam Goldwyn, I knew I wouldn't be doing an impression. I will do Goldwyn the way I see Goldwyn. The way I know Goldwyn. I've been at this for sixty years. As Billy Wilder said, 'You don't become Sam Goldwyn just by saying "Include me out." ' I gotta give Sam Goldwyn a soul."

He stood briefly at the back of the theatre, regarding the set, a replication of Goldwyn's office: floor-to-ceiling mahogany bookshelves; floor-to-ceiling windows; a huge desk with a red leather top, a telephone, and an intercom.

"As Goldwyn, I gotta get outside myself," King said. "This isn't Lear. I get to strut. I never met Goldwyn, but I saw him once, in 1956. I was with Judy Garland in London, where we did the Palladium together for sixteen weeks. One day we were walking on Bond Street, and we saw Goldwyn, dressed, as usual, to the nines. We watched him go into a little shop and come out carrying a package. So I went in and asked what he had bought. It was Zizanie cologne. I bought some. If it was good enough for Sam Goldwyn, it was my sweet smell of success. I've used it ever since—it's in my dressing room right now."

King waved genially to his director, Gene Saks, and to the play's authors, Marsha Lebby and John Lollos, waiting in the otherwise deserted orchestra seats. "Goldwyn was one of the great moguls," King said. "All of them came from Eastern Europe, within a five-hundred-mile radius of each other. Men of great egos! Very opinionated!

"I gotta find the humanity in this man!" he said, strutting toward the stage. "All I have to do is think of my own father. Goldwyn came from Poland. My father came from Poland. Goldwyn worked in Gloversville, making leather gloves. My father made leather handbags. Goldwyn fractured the English language. So did my father. My father said, 'You don't have to follow anybody—you can be your own somebody.' Goldwyn embodies that. This play takes place in 1952, the year television was coming in, and people in the movie industry were frightened. But Sam Goldwyn felt nothing would ever replace movies! He felt everybody needed movies!"



Alan King

"Mr. Goldwyn" is a two-character play, with Goldwyn intermittently addressing the audience and also his secretary, Helen, played by Lauren Klein. In the play, Goldwyn is producing the movie "Hans Christian Andersen," starring Danny Kaye. Onstage, King, as Goldwyn, said forcefully:

"Everybody seems to think I'm crazy making this picture. I was at a cocktail party two weeks ago. Some kid with a crewcut comes up to me and he says to me, like he knows me, 'Hello, Sam!' What right does this guy get to call me Sam? My children call me Mr. Goldwyn. He says to me, 'Sam, I hear you're making "Hans Christian Andersen." That's a family picture, isn't it, Sam?' I say, 'Yes, it's a family picture.' He says, 'I certainly admire your courage, Sam. Our testing indicates that there is no audience for family pictures. Today people are staying home and watching television. Today's movie audiences want sex.' "

King, as Goldwyn, barrelled his chest and said to the audience, "Sex you should have at home. For pleasure, you go to the movies!"

"Good, Alan, very good," Saks said, laughing.

They then worked on a scene of Goldwyn waiting in his office for a telephone call about how the New York opening of "Hans Christian Andersen" has gone. Over the intercom, Goldwyn tells his secretary that he won't leave until the call comes in.

Helen's voice on the intercom: "You can't be late for the Eisenhowers."

Goldwyn, yelling at the intercom: "Why can't I be late for the Eisenhowers? You know how many war bonds I bought for that man? Besides, he's not the President yet."

King was shouting at the intercom as Helen entered. He quickly turned to the door.

"It's a little too fast, Alan," Gene Saks said. "Maybe do a take? Do you know how to do a take?"

"Do I know how to do a take?" King said deferentially, dropping out of character, abandoning his Goldwyn soul. "Gene, you want me to do shtick?'

"Try it," Saks said, with a respectful smile.

"Shtick? A small shtick?" King asked, hesitantly.

He did a single take while repeating the last line. Saks and the playwrights laughed.

"I can do a double," King said. "But not a triple. Only Berle can do a triple."

He did a double, from the intercom to the secretary at the door, taking his time as he said the line: "Besides, he's not the President yet." Everybody laughed louder.

"Good, Alan. Very good," Saks said. "Shtick works."

—*Lillian Ross*

GENERAL TSO DEPT.
BIG FAT BROOKLYN

Marty Markowitz, Brooklyn's new borough president, threw the first of his annual parties celebrating the Chinese New Year in 1979, back when he was a freshman in the State Senate. A steadily growing guestlist has obliged Markowitz to change venues several times over the past twenty-four years, and to spread the proceedings over three nights, but the essential ingredients have remained the same: a mix of family, friends, cronies, and constituents, plus a few speeches, a little entertainment, and fourteen courses of Chinese food, liberally irrigated with plum wine and other mild spirits. Last week, on the second night of the party, which was held at the Ocean Palace seafood restaurant in Sunset Park, Markowitz dropped a bombshell to usher in the Year of the Horse. "Brooklyn is going on a diet in April," he told his four hundred and fifty guests. "So eat up!"

Markowitz, who is short and round, with assertive features and a full head of gray hair, dressed for the occasion in a black silk collarless jacket, which was decorated with red symbols that signify luck and longevity. As he darted from table to table—waving, blowing kisses, and bestowing hugs along the way—he explained his decision to put America's fourth-largest city on a weight-loss regime.

"I'm chubby, and most of Brooklyn is chubby," he said. "Obesity, or near-obesity, is symptomatic of a lack of self-esteem and not taking care of yourself. I mean, look around this room."

Markowitz plans to enlist the help of hospitals, schools, health clubs, and restaurants in support of his program, which he is calling "Lighten Up, Brooklyn." The goal: a borough-wide loss of two and a half million pounds, or one pound per resident. Markowitz himself will participate by dieting, taking aerobics classes on public-access television, and weighing himself in public.

Markowitz had no illusions that any of Brooklyn's weight would be shed at his party, and encouraged people to enjoy the bounty. "Pace yourself. I've done this twenty-four years—whatever you need, you order more," he told one group. When he spotted a woman complaining to a waiter that there wasn't enough Jumbo Shrimp with Honey Walnuts and Sauce to go around, he intervened on her behalf.

Markowitz's other duties as host included awarding citations to a variety of local politicians and civic leaders. One of them, Raven Patrick DeSean Dennis III, who does business as Cake Man Raven, had baked a cake in the shape of Borough Hall for Markowitz's inauguration party.

"If you ever need a special cake that represents a building or an institution, nobody puts the pounds on better than this man," Markowitz said.

Markowitz also gave an award to the owners of Ocean Palace, Jimmy and Linda Ching and Danny and Winnie Tsoi. "Ladies and gentlemen, a few years ago I went to China, where I encountered some problems with the food," he said. "Winnie was there for me, thank God, and she helped me communicate to them that I wanted Chicken Chow Fun."

Senator Charles Schumer turned up ("I'm here to chow down with everyone," he said) and left with several pairs of velvet slippers, which, along with bamboo back scratchers, were given out as party favors.

As the crowd dwindled, Markowitz spoke more about the weight-loss initiative. He said that merely pointing out the increased risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes that comes with obesity wouldn't be enough to goad his constituents into action.

"I'm going to make it a contest—neighborhood versus neighborhood," he said. "People don't want to say, 'Hey, I'm losing weight for Brooklyn.' They want to say, 'Hey, I'm doing it for Flatbush' or 'I'm doing it for Bay Ridge.' "

Around eleven, as Markowitz and his wife, Jamie, who had put together a doggy bag for her husband, got ready to go home and rest up for the next night of the party, the Borough President took care of a few details ("Danny, don't lose that citation—I have to present it to you again tomorrow") and explained why his new diet wouldn't require him to give up eating Chinese.

"Look at those guys," he said, indicating a crew of lean waiters. "Not a fatso in the bunch."

—*Adam Green*

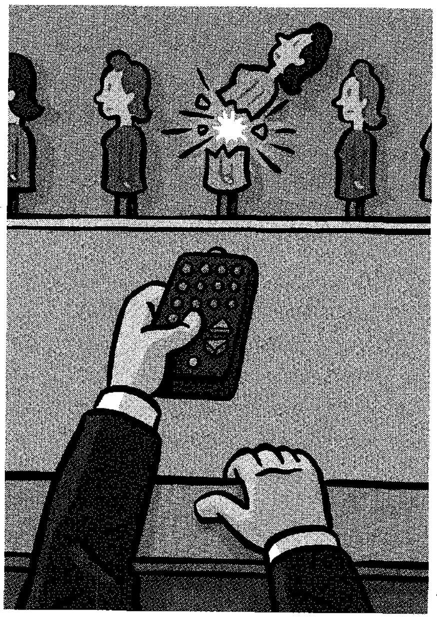
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
TV ON THE CHEAP

Six years ago, the cast members of the sitcom "Friends" threatened to walk out unless NBC agreed to renegotiate their contracts. Each of them was earning forty thousand dollars per episode, and they were now demanding six-figure deals. When Dick Wolf, the executive producer and creator of "Law & Order," heard the news, he called Warren Littlefield, then the president of NBC Entertainment, and told him that he should start firing the young stars, one by one. "I guarantee you that Warren would not have had to get rid of more than two of them before they caved," Wolf said recently.

Littlefield did not heed Wolf's advice. NBC gave the cast members a big raise, which was followed, almost four years later, by another big raise. Finally, a couple of weeks ago, the network agreed to pay each of the actors a million dollars per episode. They will now be making twenty-five times what they made in 1996. A good deal—for the stars, anyway. The show is still popular, but it's not twenty-five times more popular than it was then.

Why did Jennifer Aniston's salary demands bother Wolf enough to make him harangue Littlefield? For one thing, as a producer he had a vested interest in keeping costs down, and he knew that any large contract would ripple through the industry. (Today, he says that what happened in 1996 was "the beginning of a horrifying escalation of performers' salaries.") But Wolf had another reason for objecting to the "Friends" deal: he has built a career on refuting the show-business postulate that stars are the key to television success. To Wolf, paying any actor a million dollars per episode is madness. People tune in to see shows, not celebrities. "I have this sheet of paper, which I always keep with me," Wolf said. On the sheet is a list, made a half-dozen years ago, of actors whom the networks had signed up for future projects. "There are about fifty people on that list," Wolf said. "I think one of them is doing television today."

With "Law & Order" and its two spinoffs—"Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" and "Law & Order: Criminal Intent"—Wolf has chosen another tack, what you might call franchise television. "Law & Order" is not star-driven, though it does feature well-known actors. It focusses on story and process, rather than on character, recognizing that television is fundamentally a writer's medium. (A few years ago, Wolf sent out cards to network executives that read, "It's the writing, stupid.") Many actors have departed the show without denting its popularity. Some left because they were bored, some because they wanted larger roles, and others because they wanted more money. Paul Sorvino dropped out because he didn't want to shoot episodes outside during the winter—he feared that recurring bouts of bronchitis would make it impossible for him to sing opera. Most of the time, Wolf didn't want his actors to leave, but he offered them little incentive to stay, because ultimately he didn't need them. The show's cast door has revolved so quickly that there have been few salary disputes or prima-donna fits. Consciously or not, actors know that the "Law & Order" franchise is bigger than they are.



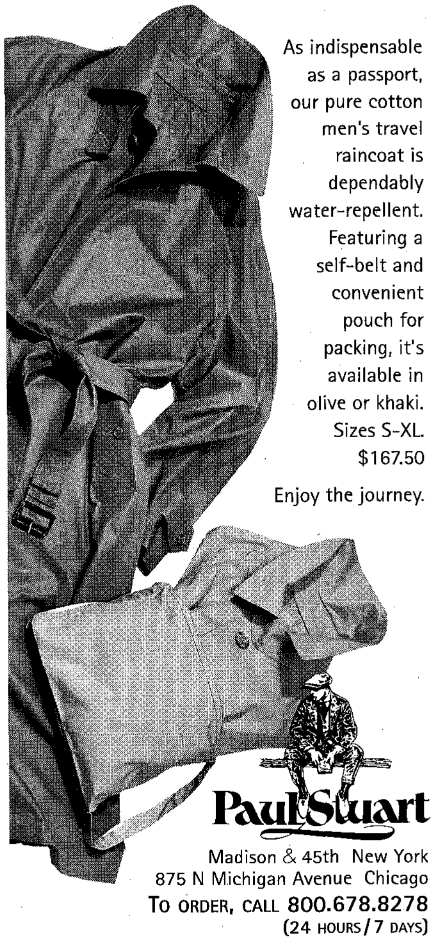
By contrast, developing a show around a star—be it "Roseanne," "Frasier," or "Doogie Howser, M.D."—insures that the star will be indispensable. When Kelsey Grammer recognizes that without him there can be no "Frasier," he effectively runs the show. The more successful the series becomes, the more leverage he gets—which is why Grammer now makes $1.6 million an episode—and the smaller the profits for the show's producers. (There also tends to be an inverse relation between the power of the star and the quality of the show, Exhibit A being the final years of "Roseanne.") At worst, you end up with the sort of problems described by the TV writer and producer Charlie Hauck in his 1993 novel "Artistic Differences." In the book, a megalomaniacal sitcom star tinkers mindlessly with dialogue, forces episodes to be scrapped, and drives a hairdresser to suicide. The writers are powerless against her, because no one will break the elementary rule of show biz: "Never let the star know that there are other people in the world."

Dick Wolf tossed this rule aside and made "Law & Order" actorproof. So far, he has gone unpunished by the Nielsen gods. The three "Law & Order" shows regularly rank in the top thirty, with "Law & Order" itself consistently in the top ten. Between prime-time showings and reruns on cable, the three series are on TV twenty-seven hours a week, and the franchise has been valued at seven hundred million dollars. Last year's one breakout hit, "C.S.I.," is basically "Law & Order" in the lab. "NYPD Blue" and "E.R.," two of the past decade's strongest hits, are franchises, not star vehicles. The big flops, meanwhile, have been would-be showcases for high-profile actors—Bette Midler, Geena Davis, Nathan Lane, and half the cast of "Seinfeld."

The real virtue of franchise TV is that success shows up not just in the ratings but on the bottom line. At $2.2 million per episode, "Law & Order" is more than three times cheaper to produce than "Friends"—no small matter at a time when network ratings and ad revenues are plunging. Yet, amid all the belt-tightening, stars keep getting multimillion-dollar deals. "Look, everybody is scared all the time," Wolf said. "So you think signing big names is a hedge, and in some ways it is." The problem, as William Goldman has observed, is that it's a hedge not against losing money but against looking foolish while doing so.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN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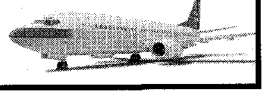

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CASUAL

SING, YOU SACHER TORTES

BY WOODY ALLEN

Not since the evanescence of Hubert, whose Flea Museum enchanted the naïfs on Forty-second Street, has the Broadway area seen a shyster to rival that peerless purveyor of schlock Fabian Wunch. Balding, cheroot-sucking, and as phlegmatic as the Wall of China, Wunch is a producer of the old school, resembling physically not so much David Belasco as Kid Twist Reles. Given the consistency and dimensions of his exaltation of flops, it has remained a puzzle on a par with string theory how he manages to raise money for each fresh theatrical holocaust.

Hence, when a beefy arm in a Sy Syms suit curled itself around my shoulder blades the other day as I perused some Rusty Warren at the Colony Record Shop, and the heady conflation of lilac Pinaud and stale White Owls subverted my hypothalamus, I could feel the wallet in my pocket instinctively clenching like an endangered abalone.

“Well, well,” a familiar raspy voice said, “just the man I want to see.”

I was among the legally insane who had put money in several of Wunch's sure things over the years, the last being “The Henbane Affair,” a West End import that chronicled the invention and manufacture of the adjustable showerhead.

“Fabian!” I squealed with affected congeniality. “We haven't spoken since your rather nasty brouhaha with the opening-night critics. I've often wondered if spraying them with Mace didn't actually make matters worse.”

“I can't talk here,” the simian impresario said furtively, “lest some nudnick get wind of a concept that is positively guaranteed to transmogrify our net worths to a number only astronomers could make sense of. I know a little bistro on the Upper East Side. Buy me lunch and I may be able to bless you with partnership in a diversion the mere road companies of which will keep your children's children in rubies the size of breadfruit.”

Were I a squid, this preamble alone would have been more than enough to trigger the ejaculation of black ink, and yet before I could scream for the riot police I found myself sucked up and flip-screened crosstown to a modest French restaurant, where, for as little as two hundred and fifty dollars per person, one could eat like Ivan Denisovich.

“I've analyzed all the great musicals,” Wunch said to me as he ordered a '51 Mouton and the tasting menu. “And what do they have in common? Let's see if you know.”

“Great music and lyrics,” I ventured.

“Well, naturally, boob. That's the easy part. I got an undiscovered genius mints hit songs like the Japs roll off Toyotas. Right now the kid walks dogs for a living, but I've been privy to his œuvre and it's everything Irving Berlin would have liked to have been if things had broken differently for him. No, the key is a great book. That's where I come in.”

“I never knew you to put pen to paper,” I said as Wunch vacuumed a concatenation of escargots from their shells.

“So our show,” he continued. “ ‘Fun de Siècle’—and *notez bien* the mischievous wordplay in the title, on account of it transpires totally in Vienna.”

“Contemporary Vienna?” I asked.

“No, dum-dum—a hoarier epoch, with all the broads in carriages and gowns à la ‘My Fair’ or ‘Gigi.’ Not to mention the myriad freaky bohemians who wax Looney Tunes all over the Ringstrasse. Only Klimt, only Schiele, only Stefan Zweig, plus a pretty fair country doodler who answers to Oskar Kokoschka.”

“Illustrious figures all,” I chimed in, as

Wunch's cheeks flushed crimson in homage to the Bordeaux region of France.

"And which fox do all these name brands go ape over?" he went on. "The love interest? A local sex bomb named Alma Mahler. You must've heard of her. She bounced 'em all—Mahler, Gropius, Werfel. You name 'em, they rifled her thong."

"Well, I don't know—"

"Well, I know. I mean, sure, I'm taking subtle license with the narrative. Otherwise, kid, we midwife a soporific. I'm modernizing the language, too. Like when Bruno Walter runs into Wilhelm Furtwängler and says, 'Hey, Furtwängler, will you be at Rilke's barbecue Saturday night?' And Furtwängler says, 'Barbecue?,' like it's clear he wasn't invited, and Walter says, 'Oops, sorry—I guess I shouldn't have opened my big yap.' See, the talk's got a today urban rhythm."

As Wunch bore down on his hot foie gras, I could feel the onset of a growing numbness in several of my key vertebrae, and I loosened my tie in an effort to breathe.

"So," he waxed on, "first comes the overture, which I see as light and catchy but in the twelve-tone scale—as a nod to Schoenberg."

"But, surely, with all those lovely Strauss waltzes—" I cut in.

"Don't be an Ignatz," Wunch said with a dismissive wave. "Those we save for the finale, when the audience is panting for relief from two hours of atonality."

"Yes, but—"

"Then the curtain goes up and the sets are in the style of the Bauhaus."

"The Bauhaus?"

"Like form follows function. In fact, the opening song is Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Adolf Loos singing 'Form Follows Function,' like 'Fugue for Tinhorns' begins 'Guys and Dolls.' It finishes and who enters but Alma Mahler herself, in a frock Jennifer Lopez would wave off as skimpy. With Alma is her composer husband, Gustav. 'Let's go, gloom puss,' she says. 'Move it.'

" 'Just one more strudel,' the fragile tunesmith replies. 'I need the blood-sugar high to keep me from sinking into my quotidian preoccupation with mortality.'

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"Meanwhile, while this is going on," Wunch elaborated, "Gropius is giving Alma the eye, which she's turned on by, and she sings, 'I'd Love to Be Groped by Gropius.' Scene 1 ends with a blackout and when Scene 2 lights up she's living with Gropius and cheating on him with Kokoschka."

"What happened to her husband, Gustav?" I queried.

"What do you think? He's eyeballing the Danube, nursing a big jones for Alma, and ready to do a brodie when who bicycles by but Alban Berg."

"No!"

" 'What obtains, Mahler? Not looking to take the coward's way out, are you?' he inquires. Mahler lays his marital meshugas on him and Berg tells him he's got just the thing. Berg says there's this bearded cat, lives at 19 Berggasse, and for a few pfennig an hour—which for some reason the guru has emended to fifty minutes, don't ask me why—he can get his sconce tightened."

"19 Berggasse? Wait a minute, Mahler was never a patient of Freud's," I protested.

"It's O.K. I made him a compulsive stutterer, which piques Freud. A childhood trauma. Mahler once witnessed a local burgomaster drown in Schlag. Now he relives it. A couch is lowered, center stage, and Freud sings a great comedy number, 'Just Say the First Thing That Comes to Mind.' Naturally, being Freud, it's all double-entendre and we take the mickey out of Viennese mores, showing that even a great writer of symphonies like Mahler is subconsciously hung up on corsets, beer, and ragtime, albeit he sets his table mining the sublime. Freud unblocks Mahler so he can write again, and as a result Mahler triumphs over his lifelong fear of death."

"How does Mahler triumph over his fear of death?" I asked.

"By dying. I figured it out—it's really the only way."

"Fabian, there are a few holes here. You didn't give Mahler a writer's block. You said he was despondent over losing Alma."

"Exactly," Wunch said. "That's why he sues Freud for malpractice."

"But if he's dead how can he sue?"

"I didn't say the story didn't need a polish, but that's what Boston and Philly are for. O.K., so at this point Alma is shacking up with Kokoschka but now she's diddling Gropius. You get the irony? She sings 'Cozy with Kokoschka,' but a minor chord in the verse tells the audience different. Plus I wrote this killer scene when Gropius accuses Kokoschka in a café of defacing his recently completed office building. 'So, Kokoschka,' he says, 'it's you which slathered an opaque ichor on my latest architectural breakthrough, the new Chazerai Towers.' Whereupon Kokoschka goes, 'If you call those dull boxes of yours architecture, then, yes, it was me.' Enraged, Gropius hurls his portion of Tafelspitz at Kokoschka, momentarily blinding him, and demands satisfaction."

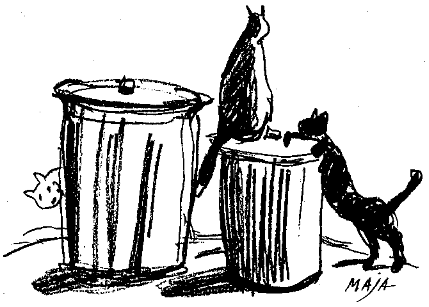
"Wait a minute," I said. "Those two great giants never fought a duel."

"Nor do they in our little cash cow, because at the last second Werfel arrives, disguised as a chimney sweep, and Alma goes off with him, leaving the pair of heartbroken swains to sing what may be the most biting piece of sophistication in Broadway history: 'My Pretty Little Schnitzel, You're the Wurst.' End of Act I."

"I don't get it. Why would Werfel be disguised as a chimney sweep? And I still say if Mahler is dead, how will he and Alma get back together the way they actually did in life?"

I was full of probing questions, much better to ask them now before a less tolerant paying audience elected instead to pass out disembowelling equipment.

"Werfel had to conceal his identity," Wunch explained, "because Kafka's in town and wants back an only copy of his new short-story masterpiece, which he lent Werfel, and which Werfel, short of confetti for a parade, was forced to dice. As far as Alma and Gustav's rapprochement goes, in Act II she cheats on Werfel with Klimt and then betrays Klimt by posing nude for Schiele."



"But—"

"Don't tell me it never happened. All those broads in garter belts Schiele drew—why couldn't one be of Alma Mahler? But it doesn't matter, because before you can say 'Franz Josef' she cops a sneak on Schiele and Klimt and as we come to the middle of Act II she's cohabiting with none other than his nibs Mr. Ludwig Wittgenstein. The two duet on 'Of Things We Cannot Speak We Must Remain Silent.' But it doesn't work out, because when Alma says 'I love you' to Wittgenstein he parses the sentence and disproves the definition of each word. The chorus dances the birth of linguistic philosophy and Alma, hurt, yet with her libido intact, belts out 'Pet Me, Popper.' Enter Karl Popper."

"Hold it!" I said, with visions of an audience fleeing up the aisles en masse like migrating caribou. "You never explained to me, since when have you turned author? I always knew you to be happy with a producer's credit."

"It's since the accident," Wunch replied, meticulously spooning up the last few molecules of profiterole. "The beloved and I were hanging a picture when she tried driving a nail into the wall and inadvertently coldcocked me with a ball-peen hammer. I must've been on queer street a good ten minutes. When I awoke, I found I could write every bit as well as Chekhov or Pinter. This whole shmegegge I just walked you through was created during a single shave. Hey, isn't that Stevie Sondheim just came in? Count to fifty, I'll be back. Want to lay a notion on him before he vanishes on me again. Poor guy must be aging. Last time he gave me his phone number, one digit was off. Settle up and I'll detail the finale for you over a Courvoisier."

And with that he table-hopped his way over to a man who resembled the author of "A Little Night Music." The last image I had as I pricked my finger and signed the check in O-negative was of Wunch lowering himself uninvited into a booth amid the cacophonous objurgations of its abashed occupant. As far as me backing "Fun de Siècle," there's an old theatre superstition that any show in which Franz Kafka sprinkles sand on the stage and does a soft-shoe is just too big a risk. ♦

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PERSONAL HISTORY

THE APOLOGY

Letters from a terrorist.

BY LAURA BLUMENFELD

The gunman was not at home. "Come in," his mother said. "Would you like some orange soda?" My knocking must have shaken her out of a nap; she was wearing slippers and a pink embroidered bathrobe. Inside, the living room was full of family members, young and old.

"That's him," the woman said, pointing over her grandchildren's heads to the gunman's photograph. "He tried to kill someone," she said in an easy voice.

"Who?" I asked.

"Some Jew," said a boy, who appeared to be about twelve years old. He smiled crookedly, and added, "I don't know who—a Mossad agent."

"I'm not sure he was a Mossad agent," a man who introduced himself as Saed, the gunman's older brother, said. "He was a person from the outside—a leader from New York. We heard he was doing something against Palestinians. Why else would they choose him to be shot?"

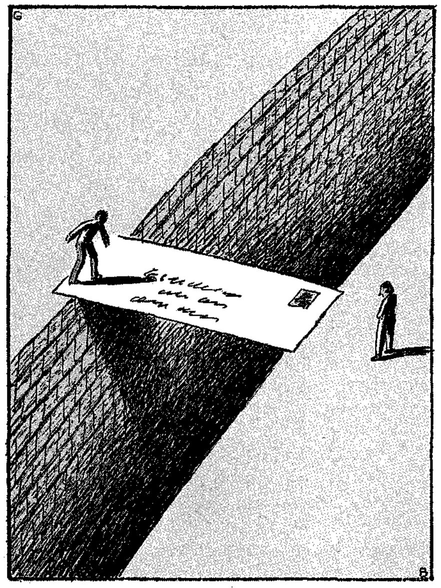
"Why did he fire only once?" I asked.

"It was in the marketplace," Saed said.

"After the shooting, he threw the gun in the air, and it fell to the ground," his mother said. She began to chuckle and the others joined in.

The attack had taken place in the early spring of 1986. It had been a quiet time in Jerusalem: people could walk through the Old City without fear. In March, all that changed when Palestinian terrorists began gunning down foreign tourists—Americans, British, Germans. Their first target was an American man; he had been shot as he strolled through the Arab market shortly after sundown. The gunman had aimed a little too high, and the bullet had grazed his scalp.

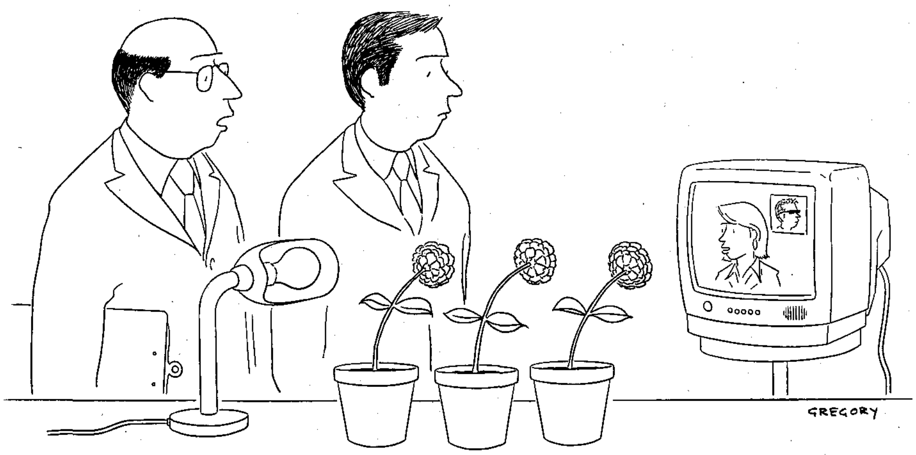
Twelve years later, I arrived in Israel for an extended honeymoon with my husband. While he did part-time legal work, I took a leave of absence from my job at the Washington *Post* to do research for a book about the culture of vengeance—the thirst for settling scores which has created so much turmoil in the Middle East and throughout the world. My research took me to Albania, Sicily, Iran, and other countries; between trips I looked for the gunman who had shot the American in the market. From records in the Jerusalem District Attorney's office, I learned that several Palestinians in a pro-Syria breakaway faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization had been convicted in 1986 for the shooting of foreigners. The man who had shot the American was named Omar Khatib. He had been tried and convicted in an Israeli court, and was now serving a sentence of twenty-five years in Shikma Prison, in Ashkelon.



In my letters to Omar, I wanted him to see his victim as a human being.

GUY BILLOUT

The Khatibs lived in the West Bank, in the last house on a narrow, rutted lane, which ended at a limestone quarry. Trash and rusty appliances spilled over the precipice. Their house, which was behind a red gate, was really a number of buildings joined together—



"Notice how they grow away from the incandescent-light source and toward the malicious celebrity gossip."

• •

cement improvisations with raw concrete steps and half-stacked cinder blocks. In rudimentary Arabic, I introduced myself as an American journalist.

"Why did he do it?" I asked the gunman's father, a tall, bony man in a gray robe.

The father's response was terse. "He did his duty," he said. "Every Palestinian must do it. Then there will be justice."

Another brother of the gunman came into the room. He introduced himself as Imad. His mustache and goatee were dyed burnt orange, and he was wearing a silky red-and-black shirt. He told me that he had been a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a radical faction of the P.L.O., and that he had returned to Palestine, after twenty-five years of exile in Jordan, in 1994, the summer after the Israelis and the Palestinians signed the Oslo peace accords. "Anybody would do what my brother did under those circumstances," he said. "If you pretend to be a Palestinian for five minutes, you'll feel what we feel."

"And what about the man he tried to kill?" I asked.

"It wasn't a personal vendetta," Imad replied. "It was public relations. It was like telling the media to pay attention to us."

"Won't someone from the victim's family kill one of your people?" I asked.

"My brother never met the man," Imad said. "Nothing personal, so no revenge."

For me, however, the shooting was personal. The man whom Imad's brother had tried to kill was my father.

In March of 1986, when I was an undergraduate at Harvard, my father, in his capacity as executive director of the New York Holocaust Memorial Commission, went to Israel to look at the country's various Holocaust museums. One evening, after a visit to the Western Wall, in Jerusalem, one of the Holy Land's most sacred sites, he was walking back to his hotel when he was shot by an unseen assailant. He was treated for the head wound in an Israeli hospital, and the story of the shooting made front-page news.

"Did you ever wonder who the gunman was or what he looked like?" I later asked my father. "I never thought about it," he replied. But, for me, putting the incident out of my mind wasn't so easy. I understood that people who commit acts of terrorism are less concerned with what happens to their victims than with advancing their cause, but I had resolved to find a way to make my father human in the gunman's eyes. And I wanted him to see that what he had done was horrible. I thought about introducing myself as the daughter of his victim but discarded the idea, because I did not want him to regard me as "a Jew" or as an adversary. Given the Palestinians' eagerness to get their views out to the world, I reasoned that the best way to gain access to him would be to identify myself to him and his family simply as an American journalist who was interested in hearing his story.

Several weeks after I met Omar's family, I went back to their house to return some clippings about the shooting which they had given me to photocopy. I was greeted by Omar's mother and his brother Imad, and led to an upstairs bedroom. We sat down on the couch where Omar had slept before his imprisonment.

"His head was here, his feet were here," his mother said, brushing the upholstery with her fingers. She brought out a black attaché case and opened it. Inside was a karate manual, a picture of Omar in martial-arts dress, executing a kick, and a black-belt certificate that he had won in 1979. The picture showed a slim young man with an angry expression on his face. There was also a copy of the Koran, a book entitled "Theories About Revolution and National Liberation," and a copy of "Measure for Measure."

"He was at Bethlehem University, studying English," Imad pointed out.

"And business, too," his mother said. "He got a ninety-five in public relations."

I was shown Omar's report cards, his birth certificate from a hospital on the Mount of Olives, and a high-school certificate of graduation that read, "The school administration certifies that Mr. Omar Kamel Said Al Khatib was a student in 1980-81. His conduct was very good." Before saying goodbye, Imad offered to take a letter from me to his brother in prison. Only immediate relatives were allowed contact with such prisoners, but Imad agreed to deliver whatever I wanted to write.

In my first letter to Omar, I explained that I was an American journalist who was writing a book about the region, and that I was curious about his life in an Israeli prison. I asked him about his hobbies and his plans for the future. At the end of the letter, I wrote, "And finally, I would like to hear about the events that led to your arrest. What happened? When you think back on it, what were your feelings then? How do you feel about it today?"

Six weeks later, Omar wrote back, in an intricate light-blue scrawl, on eight sheets of tissue paper:

> Dear Laura,
>
> I would like first to extend my appreciation and regard for your message, which I have read with interest and care. This is not a dream, but a real fact we are seeking to incarnate on land through the long march of our revolution and in accordance with rules of justice and equality and the right of people to liberate their lands, this sacred right which was secured by international law. We, as sons to this people, and part of its past and present, have on our shoulders the burden of holding the difficulty of the liberation road; it's our mission to let the rifles live.
>
> I would like you to know that our choice in the military struggle is a legitimate choice on a historical basis that takes into account the fact that the enemy we are facing is one who stands on a Zionist ideology that is racist in its basis and fascist in its aims and means. It is an enemy with a huge military destructive machine higher in its ability than any other superpower state. It's an enemy that can be faced and defeated only by force. . . .
>
> There is a huge difference, my dear, between "terror" and the right of self-determination, between a criminal and a revolutionary. . . . It is hard for us, as prisoners, to accept a peace process which does not answer all the questions that the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has raised. We continue in our efforts to affect what is going on outside the walls of our prisons.
>
> Sincerely,
> Omar Kamel Al Khatib

The letter read more like a manifesto than like an exchange between two people. I wanted to know Omar as he really was, beneath the layers of ideology, and the next day I wrote to him again and inquired about what he was currently reading, what he could tell me about his family's history, and what, in particular, had inflamed his feelings against Israel.

A month later, he replied:

> I love English literature, and have been reading it from the first years of my imprisonment; lately I have dedicated my time to the reading of theoretical and philosophical books. . . . I have read the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. I do suggest that you read Dostoevsky's "Memoirs from the House of the Dead"; it will help you in the work you are conducting.
>
> My chances of being released now are big because of my deteriorating health conditions. I suffer from asthma, an illness which puts me very near death. I'm living in unhealthy conditions, with ten of my friends in a small, cold cell very full of humidity. They smoke, cook, and do all their daily activities, which brings me a hard time. You can't imagine how it feels when you find yourself being chased even by the breath you breathe.
>
> I don't know if the Israelis consider me as "having blood on my hands," but I do know that there is no meaning in keeping me in prison after more than 13 years. The term "blood on their hands" is a bad term I do not like to hear. It is a racist term used to fulfill some political purpose aimed to distort our identity as freedom fighters.

He went on to say that he had been "chosen" to join the rebel Abu Musa faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1985, with orders to "create a state of unrest," whose objective was to put an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine.

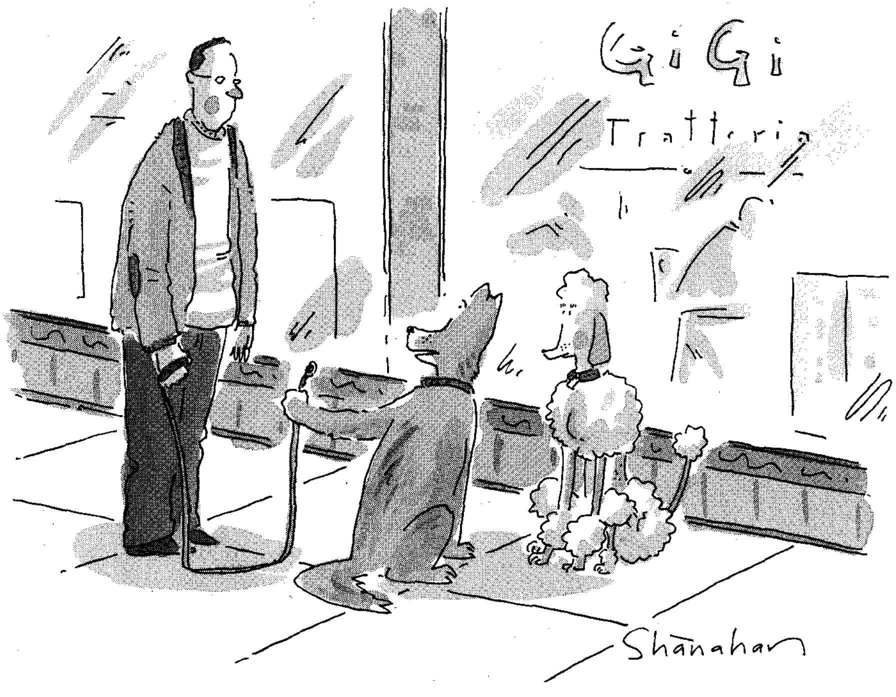
> I was young at that time, but since then I have discovered that violence is not in my personality. Maybe this is the answer to your question of why I shot just one shot at that man, despite the fact that my pistol was very full of bullets.

When Israel became a state, in 1948, Omar said, his mother's family had been forced to leave their home in Jaffa and migrate to Lebanon. Omar's father was born in the West Bank, but after his marriage to Omar's mother he had gone to live in Jerusalem, where the couple had brought up their children.

He continued:

> This city has shaped my identity; she planted in my mind unforgettable memories. I witnessed the Israeli aggression of the Six-Day War. I was four years old then, but enough aware to understand what was going on. I remember when my mother used to hide us with the rest of our neighbors who came to have shelter in our small room. We were so frightened by the darkness and the sound of guns. Six days, and the history entered into a new stage, the stage of the occupation.
>
> The resistance movement began, and at the end of the '60s my brother was arrested and sent to prison. . . . I saw the painful time that my family went through, searching to know the fate of my brother. I remember visiting him with my mother once or twice, but after that he was expelled to Jordan. . . . There he was sent to prison for no reason but under the pretext of crossing the borders illegally.
>
> We were such a poor family at the time, we didn't have enough money to eat. . . . I will never forget the exhaustion and pain of the journey when I accompanied my mother to visit my brother. . . . Do you know when I saw [my brother] next?! It was 25 years later. This time I was the prisoner, and he was the visitor. After the signing of the Oslo agreement he got the chance to return to his home land. He came to visit me at Ashkelon prison. It was a very sad meeting, we both couldn't stop crying. I had no words to say, I had forgotten everything, but felt the need of touching him, and kissing him.

For all its self-justifying tone, the letter was more candid on a personal level, and in my reply I asked Omar to describe how he had felt when he shot the man in the marketplace. I also asked him what he would say to the man if the two of them were to meet again. In his next two letters, he dwelled on the hardships of prison life and the satisfaction he felt in taking a college correspondence course. He said that he had learned French and Hebrew, and that he had written a book of grammar for



"You go on ahead."

his fellow-prisoners entitled "The Practical Use of English Structure." He said that he had six more courses to complete before earning his B.A.

In my next letter, I again asked Omar why he had shot the American tourist. Omar wrote back:

> With regard to David Blumenfeld—I hope he can understand the reasons behind my act. If I were him I would. I have thought a lot about meeting him one day. We have been in a state of war, and now we are passing through a new stage of historical reconciliation where there is no place for hatred and detestation. In this new era and atmosphere, he is welcome to be my guest in Jerusalem.

The letter hinted that Omar was capable of remorse, though an earlier reference to my father as a "chosen military site" had made me wince. And Omar's lofty talk about "historical reconciliation" made me wonder whether we were both involved in an elaborate game of manipulation, each for a different purpose. To give him a better sense of David Blumenfeld, I replied that I had contacted David, and discovered that his grandparents had been killed in the Holocaust, and that he had come to Israel to gather material for building a Holocaust museum in New York. I told him that David was not hostile to the Palestinian cause but that he was concerned about whether Omar would ever again resort to violence against anyone, innocent or not. Omar began his next letter with an account of an examination that he had undergone for his asthma, in the hope of winning a release from prison on medical grounds:

> When the van stopped in front of Ramallah hospital, it was as if I were an alien from another world. Each of the guards took his place around my vehicle. Guns were ready for use. The door was opened, and all around me I saw people looking at me strangely. I touched the ground with slow steps because my hands and legs were tied. I took a deep breath and looked at the sky, feeling the need to fly. . . . And all the people looked at me with pity and wonder because of my weak appearance.
>
> They led me to an elevator to the main section of the testing area. We waited till a very beautiful Moroccan girl came to lead us to the examination room. I introduced myself to her and spoke with her a little about the prison while she conducted the test three times. She was shocked to see the bad test results.

In his next letter, he wrote:

> Back to David, I do admire his talking to you and I appreciate his understanding, his support for my people. If these feelings are really from the depth of his heart, this may contribute a lot to our friendship. Of course, my answer to his question [about committing an act of violence again] is NO.

A few weeks later, I learned that the parole board had rejected Omar's petition for release. Two months later, his petition came up again, on appeal to a higher court. I asked Imad if I could attend the hearing, and he agreed.

The courtroom was packed with defendants and their families—Israelis and Palestinians together on the benches. Omar's mother and his brother Imad were there, along with nine other relatives. I took a seat directly in front of them. Three judges filed into the room, and finally Omar arrived. Although he was in ankle chains, his entrance was triumphant. He greeted the other prisoners effusively, shaking their hands and clapping them on the back. And yet the effects of his incarceration were visible: the skin on his face was so taut that his cheekbones cast a skeletal shadow under his eyes; there was a noticeable swelling around his mouth. His mother rushed over to him and kissed him. Imad ruffled his hair. Then Imad pointed to me. "Laura is here," he said.

"Laura!" Omar said, smiling. "I hoped to meet you one day, but not in this setting." I couldn't keep my hands from shaking as I smiled back.

"I need to know if you're sorry," I said.

"I will write David a long letter," he said.

"No, I need to know now," I said. For a moment our eyes met, and then a court officer led him away.

Several hours passed before Omar's lawyer, an energetic Israeli woman, presented the case to the judges. They listened to the details of Omar's asthma, and then gave orders for the petition to be sent back to the medical-parole committee for further review. As Omar and his family got up to leave, I realized that this was my last chance to confront him. I stood up and said, "I am David Blumenfeld's daughter, Laura Blumenfeld." For a moment, Omar and his family stared at me. Then Omar's mother, Imad, and several other relatives began to weep. I tried to explain why I had concealed my identity for so long. "I did it for one reason," I said. "This conflict is between human beings, and not between disembodied Arabs and Jews. And we're people. Not military targets. We're people with families." I turned to Omar. He looked stunned. "You promised me you would never hurt anyone again," I said. He looked at me and said nothing. As he was led away, his family rushed over to embrace me.

A few weeks later, I received another letter from Omar:

> A week has passed since the day of the hearing, and all that is in my mind and imagination is the picture of you standing in front of the court, and the echo of your voice.
>
> You made me feel so stupid that once I was the cause of your and your kind mother's pain. Sorry and please understand.
>
> Of course I was shocked to learn that you are David's daughter. I didn't sleep for almost two days. I reread all your precious letters trying to rearrange the whole puzzle again.

My stay in Israel was nearly over. Before leaving for America, I visited Omar's family one last time. The house was full of people, and in honor of my departure Omar's mother had laid out plates of vegetables, bread, and cheese. Arabic music was coming from a tape player, and several of the women and children invited me to dance with them. Imad presented me with gifts from Omar—two gold necklaces, one for me and one for my father, with Omar's name inscribed on it. I felt unsure of this display of warmth: only a short while ago, these same people had condoned the attempted killing of my father, as they might condone other attacks on innocent bystanders in their struggle with Israel, if the fragile peace process broke down.

A few weeks after I had returned to America, my father received a letter from Omar that I have read many times since, in the hope that its sentiments are genuine:

> Dear David,
>
> Thirteen years have passed. Yes, it's so late to come and ask you about your injuries, but I would like you to know that I've prayed a lot for you. I hope you are well today.
>
> I admit to having some good feeling toward you from the beginning, a feeling that made me hope to meet you one day. It seems to me that this good feeling is coming to be a reality. . . . I would like first to express to you my deep pain and sorrow for what I caused you. I've learned many things about you. You are supposed to be a very close friend to my people. I hope you believe that we both were victims of this long historical conflict. . . . Laura was the mirror that made me see your face as a human person deserving to be admired and respected. I apologize for not understanding her message from the beginning.
>
> If God helps and I get to be released, I hope you accept my invitation to be my guest in the holy city of peace, Jerusalem. ♦

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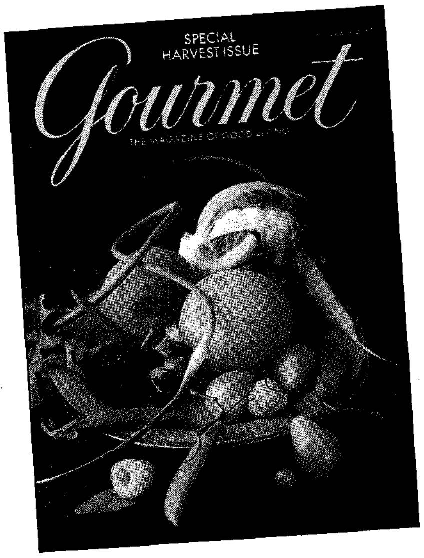

SHOW BUSINESS

THE PRODUCERS

The long-running act behind "Sweet Smell of Success."

BY ANDREW GOLDMAN

One day in the summer of 1937, David Brown and Ernest Lehman decided to make their fortunes together by conquering the world of big-time magazines. They had grown up a few blocks from each other, in Woodmere, Long Island, and after college (Brown went to Stanford, Lehman to City College) they renewed their friendship. At the time, Brown—whom Lehman remembers from those days as "kind of shy and reclusive despite the fact that he wore a Maurice Chevalier straw hat, smoked cigars, and wore green suits"—was making a meagre living as a copy editor and a second-string drama critic for *Women's Wear Daily*. Lehman spent his days pacing up and down Riverside Drive, wondering what he was going to do with his life.

The Brown-Lehman plan consisted of setting up two typewriters in a back room of Brown's apartment with the aim of producing dozens of articles for popular magazines of the day, such as *Collier's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. As a first step, Brown went out and had a letterhead made up. "David Brown Associates," it read.

"Who are the 'Associates'?" Lehman inquired.

"You are," Brown responded.

Sixty-five years later, the two men speak of each other warmly, sometimes. Brown told me recently, "We move in different worlds, yet he's my close friend, my oldest friend." And Lehman told me, "David has always been there for me when I needed him. He still worries about me. I loved him then, and I still do." The affection is real, but it has always been mixed with a fair measure of exasperation.

Now, at a combined age of a hundred and seventy-one—Brown has eighty-five of those years, Lehman eighty-six—the two old friends are testing the strength of their bond one more time, as producers of a new Broadway musical, "Sweet Smell of Success." The show is based on the 1957 movie, for which Lehman co-wrote the screenplay, which in turn was based on his own 1950 novella. After a troubled tryout in Chicago, and persistent rumors of a potential flop, the musical was reworked, and it will open on March 14th, at the Martin Beck Theatre.

David Brown Associates did not last long, but that did not prevent its two principals from making it very, very big. After the Second World War, each made his way to Hollywood, and each became a titan of the movie business. Brown became a studio executive and a producer; his list of credits has more than thirty titles, including "The Sting," "Jaws," "Cocoon," "Driving Miss Daisy," and "Chocolat." Lehman has written the screenplay for many films besides "Sweet Smell of Success," including "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," "North by Northwest," "West Side Story," and "The Sound of Music."

The two old gents have very different temperaments. Brown is sharp and urbane, with an aphorism for every situation; Lehman is flinchy and perpetually aggrieved, with a tendency toward histrionics. Brown is famous not only in his own right but also by marriage: for the past forty-two years, he has been the husband of Helen Gurley Brown, the legendary editor of *Cosmopolitan*. He is also the author of three books, including "Brown's Guide to Growing Gray," about the joys of dotage, and "Let Me Entertain You," a memoir. Lehman, meanwhile, has been struggling for years on a memoir of his own, tentatively titled "How the Hell Should I Know?" He still lives in Southern California, where he sits at home complaining of chronic pain and washing down handfuls of pills with chocolate-flavored Ensure. According to Brown, this is nothing new. "Ernest is a hypochondriac," Brown told me. "He's seen

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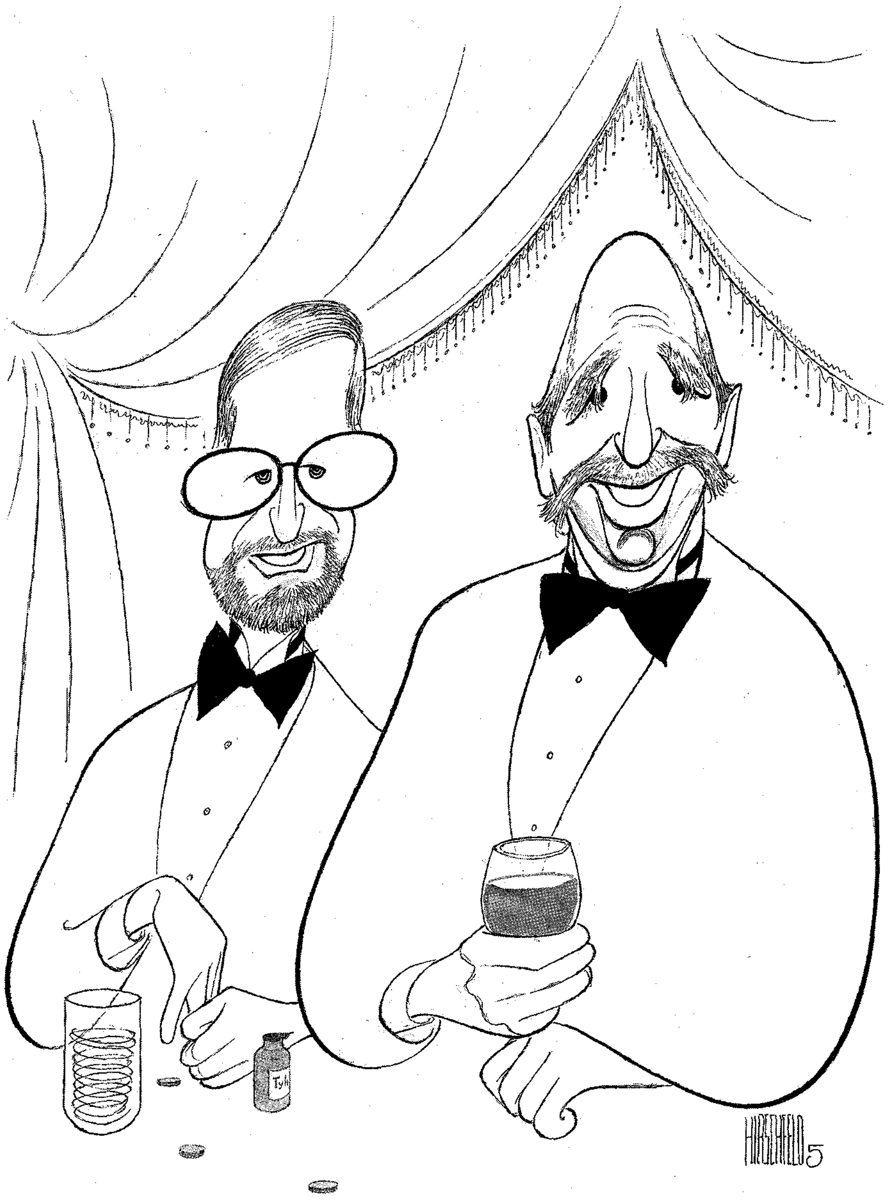


Ernest Lehman and David Brown: Lehman wrote it; they still argue about the rest.

AL HIRSCHFELD

One afternoon last December, Lehman was in his house, in Brentwood, propped uneasily on a love seat in a pastel-colored back bedroom. (The décor is the creation of Lehman's interior designer, Charmian Carr, the actress who, thirty-seven years ago, played Liesl in "The Sound of Music," one of Lehman's biggest hits.) Lehman was wearing a suspiciously full head of gray hair, a jaunty Vandyke beard, a comfy cardigan, and a pair of slippers, and he looked small. He was going over some clippings about the Chicago run of "Sweet Smell of Success," which the show's press agency had faxed him. Suddenly, he looked up from a page of the New York *Post*. "Who the hell is Marty Richards?" he demanded loudly. (Richards is one of the musical's other producers, a Broadway fixture whose many credits include "Chicago.")

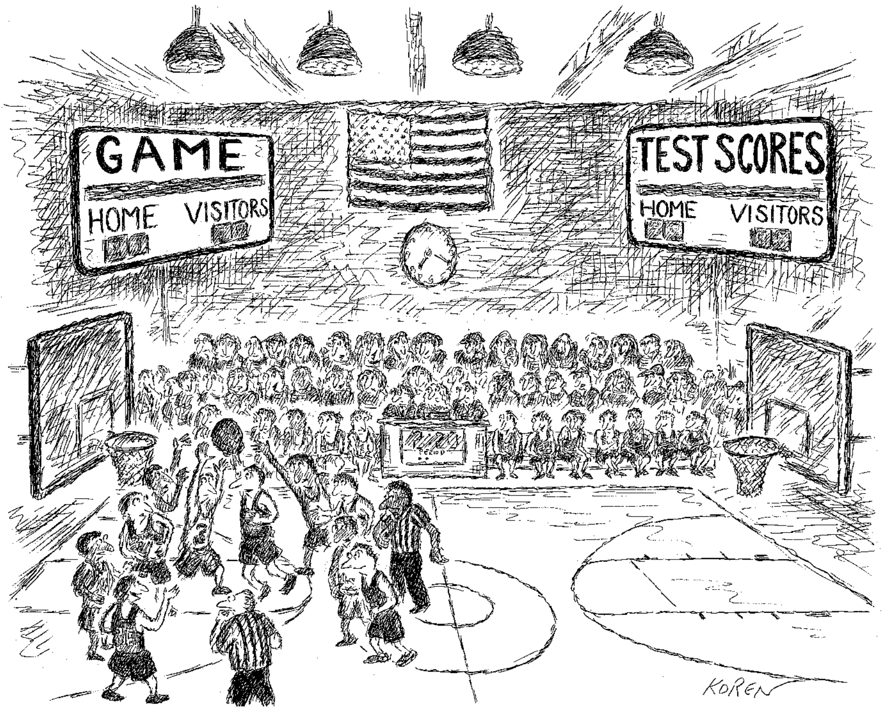
" 'The show,' " Lehman read aloud from Cindy Adams's gossip column, " 'has John Lithgow and I can't remember who else. Neither can he' "—Richards. Lehman tossed the page aside and yelled, "What do you mean! You're producing the show and you can't remember who else is going to be in it? This Marty Richards must be slightly off his rocker. And Cindy Adams must be slightly off her rocker, because she can't get anything straight!" He shook his head. A couple of months earlier, he said, Adams had mentioned the show in another column. In that one she'd said that the novella of "Sweet Smell of Success" had been written by David Brown. This is a sore point for Lehman.

Brown and Lehman agree on who wrote "Sweet Smell of Success," but they differ on how it came to be published. They also agree that, just before the war began, Lehman briefly took a thirty-five-dollar-a-week job working for a publicity man named Irving Hoffman. Studio bosses like Darryl F. Zanuck and Harry Cohn paid Hoffman generously to provide favorable copy about their movies to Walter Winchell's newspaper column. Some years later, Lehman drew on the experience for a tale about a corrupt columnist called J. J. Hunsecker and a scheming press agent named Sidney Falco. In 1950, *Cosmopolitan*—then still a general-interest magazine—bought the novella, for five thousand dollars.

This is where the stories diverge. Brown, in his memoir, wrote, "I purchased the story for *Cosmopolitan* but had to retitle it 'Tell Me About It Tomorrow!' because my editor, Herbert R. Mayes, could not abide the word 'smell.' "

"Now, David's memory is a little faulty," Lehman said in a tone of strained patience, after Brown's words were read to him. "David doesn't realize that he wasn't the editor of *Cosmopolitan* and he didn't buy that novella!" In Lehman's version of events, he and Brown weren't even on speaking terms when *Cosmopolitan* bought "Sweet Smell of Success." Lehman told me that after the war he had a good run publishing his short stories in another popular magazine, *Liberty*. His luck ran out, he said, when his old friend David Brown became *Liberty's* editor-in-chief. "David called me and said, 'Ernest, I have bad news. None of my editors seemed to go for your most recent story. I thought it was wonderful, but I'm going to have to reject it.' " Lehman paused and gathered himself. Then he went on, "Here he is, my closest friend! Editor-in-chief of my home-town magazine! I said, 'Hey, wait a minute, you're the editor-in-chief! What do you mean, you're going to have to reject it?' "

After that, Lehman says, he didn't speak to Brown for a year, and in the interim the fiction editor of *Cosmopolitan* bought a story from him. It was, of course, "Sweet Smell of Success." Soon after-



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ward, Brown was hired at *Cosmopolitan* as an editor and was given the task of asking Lehman to decide on a different title. Lehman also remembers that it was he, not Brown, who came up with the new title, "Tell Me About It Tomorrow!" "You'd have to be God to know," Lehman said, sighing. "But I think I said it first. I honestly do."

Lehman shuffled into the living room and dropped onto a couch as Gladys, his housekeeper, appeared with a tray containing his afternoon pills. "I don't feel so well," he said. "I have a longstanding, incurable pain at the base of the penis, where a lot of nerves converge." He looked down at his lap. "Jesus," he moaned. "I take Paxil; I take Dilaudid, which is a narcotic. It doesn't even put a dent in the pain. I take OxyContin, Klonopin. At night, before going to sleep, I take three Ambien, two trazodones, and a strong Halcion."

Listening to Ernest Lehman, it is easy to forget that he may be the most successful screenwriter who ever lived. None of his screenplays have won an Oscar, however, and this bothers him. He says that he consulted a hypnotist before the 1960 Academy Awards to prevent him from crumbling in public if he failed to win the Best Screenplay Award for "North by Northwest." So it doesn't help that in 1991 David Brown picked up the Academy's Irving G. Thalberg Award for career achievement.

Last year, Lehman finally received an honorary Oscar—a lifetime-achievement award, which sits on a bookshelf above his bed. But even this happy event was not without its complications. Helen Gurley Brown, for one, was annoyed on behalf of her husband. "I thought Ernest might have squeaked in a tiny mention of David in his speech," she told me. "David brought him to California and gave him numerous assignments. I thought Ernest might have made a tiny little mention, like 'A little hello to my friend David Brown, who was the one who started it all happening.' "

"I was on too long as it was!" Lehman says. "I had a wife and a former wife to thank!"

At about the time that "Sweet Smell of Success" started to look as if it might actually make it to Broadway, Lehman's wife of fifty-two years, Jackie, was dying of cancer and Alzheimer's disease, and Lehman met a nice woman named Laurie Sherman in a Writers Guild chat room. She was twenty-seven then; now, eight years later, she's Mrs. Ernest Lehman and has just given birth to the couple's first child.

"She's not a bimbo," Brown says of his friend's young wife. "I don't mean that disparagingly—bimbos can be wonderful. She's an attractive young woman who doesn't work anymore. She loves him. She fell for it. How do you fall for a guy of eighty-five? I don't know."

The new Mrs. Lehman is familiar with the fissures in the Brown-Lehman friendship. "I think Dave might be a little upset with us," Ernest Lehman told me with a grin. "My wife dabbles in genealogy, and she looked at the New York census from 1925. There were the Lehmans on Milton Place in Woodmere, and a few blocks away were the Freundlichs. David's real name was Freundlich. I mean, he's not too thrilled with publicizing that. I would say he'd be a little embarrassed. I think most people would assume he's not Jewish."

I called Brown to ask him about Mrs. Lehman's census research.

"No! That's not true!" he said. "Freundlich was my stepfather's name. My mother married a man named Freundlich, but my father's name was Edward F. Brown. My name was always Brown! Born Brown! I have a birth certificate: Brown!" He went on to say that his mother was Jewish, but added, "My father was a member of the Southampton bathing club, grew up in Southampton. Yeah, I've got a little Wasp blood."

David Brown is known as a generous tipper, and at lunch one day recently at Gabriel's, a restaurant down the street from the office of his company, the Manhattan Project, the staff hovered over him attentively. With an ear-to-ear mustache and hooded eyes that give him the aspect of a very satisfied old house cat, he sipped from his one allotted glass of lunchtime Cabernet as he mulled over his old friend. Even when Lehman comes East for the "Sweet Smell of Success" première, it is unlikely that the two will have lunch together. "I gave up going to restaurants with Ernest, because the table was always too close to the air-conditioner," Brown said. "I would just say, 'I am not going to move again.' " Although he enjoys telling tales of his friend's idiosyncrasies (when Lehman lived in New York, Brown says, he used to call City Hall every time he found a loose manhole cover), Brown speaks of his old pal with fondness, usually.

His mood tends to darken, though, when he starts reminiscing about his early days in Hollywood. In 1951, Darryl Zanuck hired Brown away from his magazine job in New York and put him in charge of Twentieth Century Fox's literary scouts. When Zanuck's son Richard took over studio operations from his father, Brown became his No. 2. After the studio enjoyed a string of successes which began with "The Sound of Music," in 1965 (screenplay by Ernest Lehman), Brown and Zanuck found themselves on a losing streak, culminating with 1970's "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls" (screenplay by Roger Ebert) and the same year's disastrous sex romp "Myra Breckinridge," which starred Raquel Welch as a post-op transsexual. Brown and Zanuck decided to try to pull out of their slump with a screen adaptation of Philip Roth's "Portnoy's Complaint," an idea that Lehman brought to them, in the hope of writing and directing. The project didn't generate much enthusiasm around the studio, though, and not long after Zanuck, Sr., read the gamiest parts of the script aloud to Twentieth Century Fox's board of directors, Brown and Zanuck, Jr., were out.

In Brown's view, Lehman remained untainted by the "Portnoy's Complaint" controversy. He had become a powerhouse by then, despite having suffered a career setback after the movie version of "Sweet Smell of Success." Burt Lancaster's production company had promised him that he would write and direct the picture, but he ended up spending more time lining up call girls for his fellow-producers than working. Lehman was replaced as director, and this indignity brought on a case of spastic colon so severe that he was sent off on a six-week trip to the South Pacific to recuperate. After that, things began to look up, starting with his 1959 collaboration with Alfred Hitchcock on "North by Northwest." By the time Brown and Zanuck were fired from Fox, Lehman was driving around town in a Cadillac and, as Brown remembers, wearing silk Nehru jackets and gold chains.

"I did harbor some resentment," Brown said at lunch. "Ernest could have saved our asses then. He was so hot. If he had said, 'I'm going to do two pictures for you guys,' we could have gotten a job immediately. He didn't do that."

I asked Lehman about that period. He remembers the strain on the friendship but attributes it to something else. He says that back in the sixties, long before the "Portnoy's Complaint" debacle, someone at Twentieth Century Fox sounded him out about running the studio. "Dave fled into the night from his home," he said, "and went someplace to get drunk at the thought that Ernie, the junior member of our writing team, was getting an offer to run the studio he worked for."

Helen Gurley Brown remembers some details of the incident, including a scene at the couple's house in Pacific Palisades. "David and Ernest had a little discussion," she said. "All I know is that the next day my tile bathroom floor was flooded and David had hit his head on the toilet. I don't know if he was throwing up or what he was doing. It was a disaster. But they got it all sorted out."

In any case, in 1975, five years after being escorted off the Fox lot, Brown and Zanuck produced "Jaws." A story in *Time* noted that, with the pair's forty-one-per-cent gross from the movie, Zanuck and Brown would each net around twenty million dollars. David Brown would never have to work again.

A few weeks after my visit to Brentwood, David Brown called to tell me that his friend Ernest had a few more things he wanted to talk to me about. Lehman then telephoned—several times—and said he was nervous about the stories he had shared about his old friend David Brown. "I would be horrified if I spoiled my relationship with David, because we've been friends for so long," he said. "I didn't give David credit for looking after me all these years. I made all that fuss with you about who did what to whom on the novella. But David has really been sort of a mentor, an older brother to me, and very supportive, and I didn't want any of that feeling to get lost." He seemed genuinely contrite.

Then I told Lehman what Helen Gurley Brown had said about her husband being snubbed by his Oscar acceptance speech. Was it true, I asked, that David Brown was instrumental in giving Lehman his start in Hollywood? There was a long silence on the other end of the line.

"Was he instrumental?" Lehman mused aloud. "No!" he said finally. "No! He had nothing to do with it!" ♦

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ANNALS OF POLITICS

THE ORATOR OF THE DAWN

With one speech, Hubert Humphrey made himself a national figure. He wanted to be President. So did Lyndon Johnson.

BY ROBERT A. CARO

The association between Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey ended in sadness. Humphrey's years as Johnson's Vice-President—from January, 1965, through January, 1969—were years of repeated humiliations at Johnson's hand, humiliations that were not only governmental (Johnson systematically excluded him from crucial foreign-policy meetings, and stripped him of responsibilities even in the field—civil rights—in which Humphrey had been a national leader) but personal as well. Aides of both men say that although there were periods of camaraderie between them, on the whole, in the words of Walter Heller, the chairman of Johnson's Council of Economic Advisors, "L.B.J. treated him like a staff sergeant might treat a private. I was just appalled. I was embarrassed." Humphrey was not even allowed to use an official plane until Johnson had personally approved the passenger list. And once, in January, 1967, while Humphrey was talking with a former assistant, Thomas L. Hughes, in Washington's Rock Creek Park (because he was afraid his apartment was bugged), he said that the previous evening Johnson had forced him, in the living room of the Vice-President's own apartment, while the two men's wives were cooking dinner in the kitchen, to stand up, as if before an audience, and repeat an entire speech he had recently given. Humphrey tried to beg off: "Oh, I just say the usual things." But Johnson insisted: "I'd like to hear." ("There he is, lying on the sofa scratching himself as he talked," Hughes recalls Humphrey saying.) And as soon as Humphrey began the speech, Johnson went to the bathroom, calling over his shoulder as he urinated, "Keep talkin', Hubert. I'm listenin'." And when, in 1968, Humphrey won the Democratic nomination to succeed Johnson, he found his campaign against Richard Nixon shackled by the President's insistence that he unequivocally support the Administration's Vietnam policies, and the shackles were soldered fast by Johnson's refusal during most of the campaign to give Humphrey either the campaign funds he controlled or an enthusiastic endorsement. After Humphrey, fifteen points behind in the polls late in the race, finally nerved himself to take a slightly more independent stance on Vietnam, he rapidly closed the gap, but there wasn't enough time to close it completely; he lost the popular vote to Nixon by seven-tenths of a percentage point. "My dreams and hopes were smashed in a year when so much more in America was destroyed," he was to say. And he understood at least one of the reasons for his defeat: "After four years as Vice President . . . I had lost some of my personal identity. . . . It would have been better that I stood my ground. . . . I ought not to have let a man who was going to be a former President dictate my future."

The association between the two men had begun almost twenty years before, when they were both young senators. It was then, wrote Johnson's fellow-Texan and friend William S. White, of the New York *Times*, that Lyndon Johnson first "fixed his restless, reckoning eyes on" Hubert Humphrey.

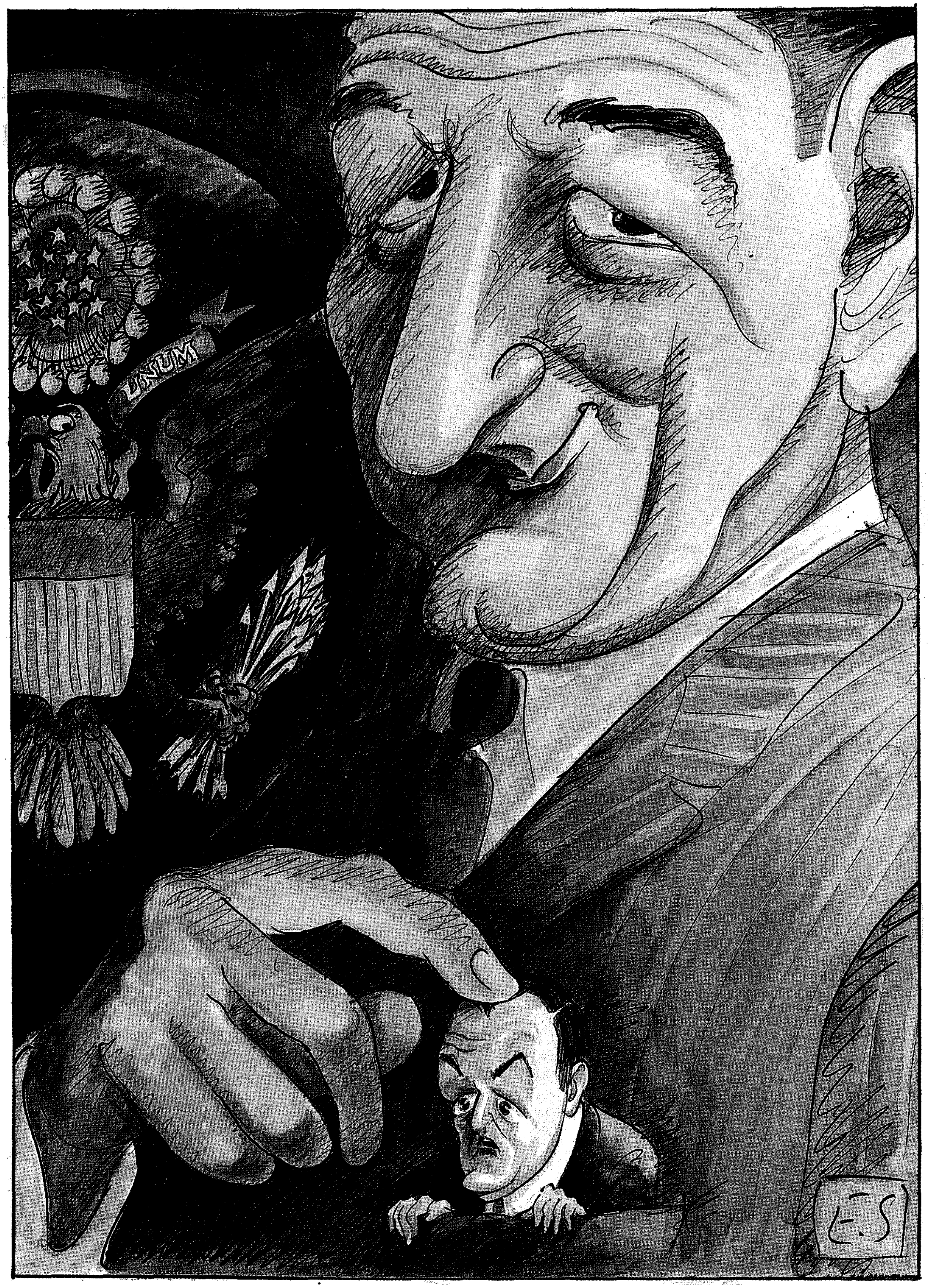
In 1951, Johnson, still only in his third year in the Senate, was already the Democratic Party's "whip," or Assistant Leader, and was planning for the day when he would become Leader—and would find himself faced with the problem that previous Democratic Senate Leaders had been unable to solve, and that had been a major cause of their failure: the hostility-filled chasm between the Party's ardent liberals and defiant conservatives which kept a Leader from presenting a unified front. For Johnson to avoid his predecessors' fate, he would have to find a bridge over that seemingly unbridgeable gulf, some means of compromise between two factions so bitterly divided that no compromise seemed possible. And since he was being elevated to power by the Senate's "Southern Caucus"—the twenty-two conservative senators from the eleven former Confederate states who voted as a bloc under the leadership of Richard Russell, of Georgia—he was regarded as a conservative, and the instrument of compromise would have to be found on the liberal side of the chasm.

As Nathaniel Hawthorne said of Andrew Jackson, "His native strength . . . compelled every man to be his tool that came within his reach; and the more cunning the individual might be, it served only to make him the sharper tool." No man, in 1951, would have seemed less likely to be an instrument of compromise than Humphrey; no senator, indeed, would have seemed less likely to be anyone's tool. But the more cunning the man, the sharper the tool—the more uncompromising the man, the better tool he would be for the making of compromises.

Hubert Humphrey had burst onto the national stage as the very symbol—courageous, passionate—of unwillingness to compromise, as the defiantly unyielding champion of a noble cause.

The stage was the 1948 Democratic National Convention, the last non-air-conditioned Convention ever held by either major party, and the temperature on the podium in Philadelphia's Convention Hall was ninety-three degrees. It was the Convention's third day, the day scheduled for President Harry Truman's renomination and acceptance speech, but the delegates' mood, dispirited and downcast because Truman was considered to have no chance to win (in the hall, the Party's Vice-Presidential nom-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EDWARD SOREL



"I am learning a great deal from you," Humphrey wrote Johnson. "You're one teacher who makes a fellow like what he is being taught."

"I'm getting back to being able to enjoy the little things—like firing people."

inee, Alben Barkley, later recalled, "the very air smelled of defeat"), had become angry, over civil rights.

Party leaders, up to the President himself, had concluded that if any slim chance of victory existed, that chance rested on the South, the only section of the country that, in good times and bad, remained solidly Democratic, and they felt that that chance would disappear completely if the Party antagonized the Old Confederacy. They had, therefore, agreed that the platform's civil-rights plank would be bland and unspecific enough to satisfy the South. And the Convention's organizers had tried to muffle dissent over the civil-rights plank by including only about twenty liberals (and only four from the militantly liberal Americans for Democratic Action) on the hundred-and-eight-member Platform Committee.

Refusing to bow to the committee's majority, however, these liberals had held out during the first two days of the Convention for a much stronger, uncompromising civil-rights plank, one that endorsed proposals Truman himself had made two years earlier. They had even rallied some support in the committee, largely because of Humphrey, the thirty-seven-year-old mayor of Minneapolis, who seemed to have a devotion to civil rights, and who, as mayor, not only had secured in his city the passage of the nation's first effective Fair Employment Practices ordinance but had also worked doggedly to erase the city's reputation as "the capital of anti-Semitism in the United States."

When, fifteen months earlier, sophisticated Eastern liberal leaders had gotten their first look at Humphrey, during an A.D.A. conference in Chicago, he had been unimpressive, with his sombre black suit, a Phi Beta Kappa key dangling ostentatiously from a gold chain across his vest, and a penchant for farmyard anecdotes so corny they made the Ivy Leaguers wince. Then he rose to speak. Decades later, Joseph Rauh, a Harvard graduate and a founder of the A.D.A., could still recall how "dazzled" he had been by the young mayor's passion and sincerity, how he had brought the audience to its feet, applauding and cheering, and how, during the long evening of talk which followed, he had won their hearts. As uncompromising on the page as on the platform, he had demanded, in an article in *The Progressive*, that the Democratic Party and the Administration "lead the fight for every principle" in "To Secure These Rights," a report made by a blue-ribbon Presidential commission. "It is all or nothing," he wrote. And now, in a steaming meeting room in Philadelphia's Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, he still wouldn't compromise, fighting so unflinchingly against Party leaders that, after one heated exchange, Senator Scott Lucas, of Illinois, muttered, "Who does this pipsqueak think he is?"—the first of many times Lucas was to use that word, sputtering with anger, during the turbulent hours that followed. Initially, only four or five other committee members supported Humphrey, but as the hours passed and he kept fighting, sweat dripping down his thin, pale face, others began to be swayed by arguments that were not only moral but political; didn't they understand, he demanded of the stony-faced Party elders on the committee, that the black vote was becoming pivotal in the North's big cities, and that if the Democratic Party didn't stand up for a strong plank, they might lose that vote? The battle went on for two days and nights; Humphrey's friends from Minnesota, knowing that when he got involved in a fight he forgot about eating, sent him in food. (Despite their efforts, he lost eighteen pounds from an already thin frame during the Convention.) At the end, the liberals' proposals lost by a big majority, and the "moderate" plank was adopted; Humphrey, who had called it "a sellout to states' rights," "a bunch of generalities," said that when the platform was brought to the Convention floor for ratification the following day, the liberals would offer a minority plank, and ask the Convention as a whole to adopt it instead of the moderate proposal.

Over and over again, that evening and all through the night, the liberals were warned about the fate of the Democratic Party if they persisted: the Southerners might even walk out of the Convention and form their own party; at the very least the Party would be split wide open and the last hopes of victory would vanish. And warnings were issued also about the fate of Humphrey, who the liberals all assumed would lead the floor fight, for, as one of his biographers was to put it, only his oratory could "give them a chance . . . on the convention floor." Truman's assistant for minority affairs, David K. Niles, laid it on the line to Rauh: "Joe, you won't get fifty votes on your minority plank, and all you'll do is ruin the chances of the No. 1 prospect for liberalism in the country." Another member of the Administration was angrier. Pulling Rauh aside in a hotel corridor, he said, "You A.D.A. bastards aren't going to tell us what to do."

Humphrey was told to his face that speaking for the minority plank would permanently ruin his career; that, as the journalist Irwin Ross reported, "he was sacrificing a brilliant future in a crackpot crusade. 'You'll split the party wide open if you do this. You'll kill any chances we have of winning the election in November.' " And for many hours of that night, Rauh recalls, Humphrey "was not at all sure what to do. . . . He was reluctant to make a big fight and speech on the floor." He was well aware that, "personally," as Ross put it, "he had much at stake"—starting with his own upcoming bid for the Senate. "If he won in November, he was likely to be one of the national leaders of the party." And, as Ross put it, "Humphrey's personal sympathies were firmly engaged in the cause, of that his colleagues never had any doubt; on the other hand, he was a professional politician who was being asked to challenge the entire national leadership of the party."

Humphrey was also aware, he was to recall, that the customary course in such a situation was to compromise: "I knew that the traditional thing to do was to make a gesture toward what was right in terms of civil rights, but not so tough a gesture that the South would leave the Democratic coalition."

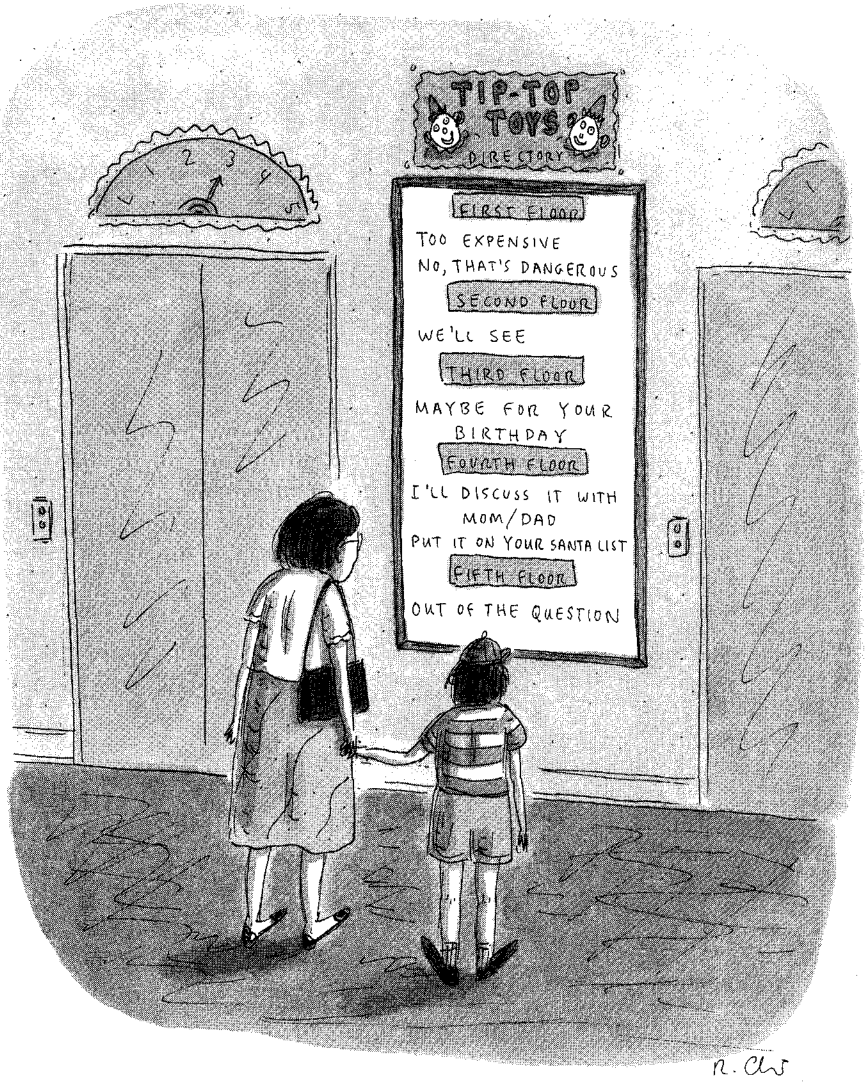
But, Humphrey was also to say, some issues were beyond compromise. "For me personally and for the party, the time had come to suffer whatever the consequences." At about five o'clock in the morning, after he and a small group of liberal friends had been talking for hours in a hotel room, he said abruptly, "I'll do it." His friend Orville Freeman recalls him saying, "If there is one thing I believe in in this crazy business, it's civil rights. Regardless of what happens, we're going to do it. Now get the hell out of here and let me write a speech and get some sleep." And the next afternoon, after the majority plank had been proposed, Hubert Humphrey, in a stifling hall (the Secret Service had closed all the doors in anticipation of Truman's arrival to accept the nomination) packed to the rafters with hot, bored delegates impatient to hear the President—many of them hardly knew who Humphrey was—stepped to the microphone.

Usually, he rushed into his speeches, but this time he paused for a long moment before beginning to speak, as if he were gathering himself, a very thin figure perspiring so heavily under the glare of the lights that his black hair glistened and beads of sweat ran down his high forehead; and his face, as the historian David McCullough puts it, was "shining," with sweat and sincerity. Paul Douglas, the liberal Senate candidate from Illinois, who was sitting in the crowd below him, was to say many years later, "No braver David ever faced a more powerful Goliath. I can see Hubert still, his face shining with an incandescent inner light." And as he began to speak, his words slashing across the murmur of the restless throng, "the audience," as one writer put it, "grew quiet, suddenly aware that someone they wanted to listen to was talking."

For once, his speech was short: only eight minutes long, in fact—only forty-three sentences. And by the time Humphrey was halfway through those sentences, his head tilted back, his jaw thrust out, his upraised right hand clenched in a fist, the audience was cheering every one—even before he reached the climax, and said, his voice ringing across the hall, "To those who say that we are rushing this issue of civil rights—I say to them, we are one hundred and seventy-two years late!

"To those who say this civil-rights program is an infringement on states' rights, I say this—the time has arrived in America for the Democratic Party to get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights.

"People," Humphrey cried, in phrases that seemed to just burst out of him. "People! Human beings! This is the issue of the twentieth century. . . . In these times of world economic, political, and spiritual—above all, spiritual—crisis, we cannot—we must not—turn back from the path so plainly before us. That path has already led us through many valleys



of the shadow of death. Now is the time to recall those who were left on that path of American freedom. Our land is now, more than ever before, the last best hope on earth. I know that we can—know that we shall—begin here the fuller and richer realization of that hope—that promise—of a land where all men are truly free and equal.”

All his life, Hubert Humphrey had had a voice that could bring people to their feet, that could make them raise their banners and march, and people came to their feet now, banners raised, marching.

The Minnesota delegation was flanked by the delegation from Georgia to its left, Louisiana to its right, Virginia behind, and Kentucky in front, so that when the Minnesotans jumped up—the first delegation to do so, coming shouting to their feet as Humphrey shuffled his papers together and turned away from the podium—their banners were surrounded by the seated, glaring delegates of the South. But their banners were not alone for long. While Humphrey had been speaking, there had been something else that Paul Douglas would never forget: “hard-boiled politicians dabbing their eyes with their handkerchiefs.” Turning to one of the toughest of those old pols, Ed Kelly, the mayor of Chicago and head of the delegation, who was seated beside him, Douglas said, “Mr. Mayor, that was a great speech.” Mr. Mayor, he said, we can win now—“If Illinois will lead a parade,” we can win. “We will fall in behind you.” Kelly had been adamantly opposed to the stronger civil-rights plank, because he thought it had no chance of passage and would only divide the Party. “Paul,” Kelly said now, “we ought to have a parade, and Illinois ought to lead it. I would like to do so. But I am getting old, my legs are tired, and I couldn’t hold up under this terrible heat.”

“He paused for a moment,” Douglas was to recall, “and then he said, ‘But, Paul, I want you to lead the parade.’ ” Lifting the Illinois standard from its socket, Kelly handed it to Douglas, and then turned to the delegation, pointed at Douglas, and motioned them to follow him down the aisle.

A forty-piece band that had been organized by James Caesar Petrillo, the president of the American Federation of Musicians, had been kept hidden under the podium, because it was not supposed to begin playing until President Truman appeared in the hall, later that evening. But Petrillo had been staring up at Humphrey as he spoke, and suddenly Petrillo motioned the band to begin playing. As Douglas led Illinois forward, the big California delegation fell in behind it. “Then New York, overcoming the caution of its Tammany leaders,” Douglas recalled. “Delegation after delegation joined us. . . . Here and there groups of sullen Southerners and conservative Northerners remained stubbornly in their seats, but the main mass of Democrats was moving with jubilant feet toward a better and more equal America.”

“How could I know that you would be as needy in the bust as you were arrogant in the boom?”

In the vote on Humphrey’s minority plank, Truman’s Missouri, Barkley’s Kentucky, Democratic Chairman Howard McGrath’s Rhode Island, and, of course, the Southern delegations all voted no. But Kelly cast Illinois’s sixty votes, which had been counted in the Southern camp, for the minority plank. And then came the states of the Northeast: the thirty-six votes of New Jersey, the ninety-eight votes of New York, the seventy-four votes of Pennsylvania. The vote, $651\frac{1}{2}$-$582\frac{1}{2}$, was for the minority plank. A huge roar of triumph filled the hall. Later, analyzing the victory, Humphrey said it could be explained “in part by conscience, in part by political realism.” The bosses of the Northeast “probably supported us because they wanted something to attract the votes of liberals, Negroes, minorities, and labor. Maybe they wanted to protect us from the appeal on the left of Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party.” And “they reflected, and our victory reflected, a deep current running in the Party and in the country.” But that evening there was no analysis, there was only triumph. “All we knew was that we, a group of young liberals, had beaten the leadership of the Party and led them closer to where they ought to have been.” Leaving the hall, a member of Minnesota’s National Committee, Eugenie Anderson, heard a reporter say, “Can you beat that, the A.D.A. has licked the South.”

In the White House, a furious Truman assailed Humphrey and his liberals as “crackpots” who wanted the South to desert the Party. Southerners did walk out during the balloting for the Presidential nominee, but only some Southerners: the Mississippi delegation and half of the Alabama delegation. Those who remained decided at the last minute to nominate their own candidate (Richard Russell), but he received only two hundred and sixty-three votes (to Truman's nine hundred and forty-seven and a half). Delegates from a number of Southern states eventually formed a Dixiecrat Party and nominated their own candidate, Strom Thurmond, but in the November election they received only a total of thirty-nine electoral votes from five states. And, as McCullough writes, "The fact was the convention that seemed so pathetically bogged down in its own gloom had now, suddenly, dramatically, pushed through the first unequivocal civil rights plank in the party's history; and whether Truman and his people appreciated it or not, Hubert Humphrey had done more to reëlect Truman than would anyone at the convention other than Truman himself." A crucial element in the President's stunning upset victory in November was the allegiance of blacks in the big cities.

At the time, there were not a few comparisons between Humphrey's speech and what has been described as "the only convention speech that ever had a greater impact on the deliberation of the delegates"—William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" oration of half a century before—but later events were to blur the memory of Humphrey's speech so that today it is all but lost to history. Nothing, though, could ever dim the memory of that speech for those who were there to hear it. "It was the greatest speech I ever heard," Paul Douglas said many years later. "He was on fire, just like the Bible speaks of Moses." Recalling the "magnificent" line about moving out "into the bright sunshine of human rights," Douglas said, "To me, he will always be the orator of the dawn." And at the time the speech, and the national acclaim it brought him, gave a boost to Humphrey's career. No Democrat had ever won popular election to the Senate in Minnesota, and he had entered the race against the formidable incumbent, Joseph Ball. Now, arriving back in Minneapolis after the Convention, Humphrey was hoisted to the shoulders of a crowd that carried him through the streets, and he went on to win in a rout. His arrival in Washington in January, 1949, as a senator-elect was heralded on the cover of *Time* magazine, on which the "glib, jaunty spellbinder with a 'listen-you-guys' approach" was portrayed as a tornado whirling into the capital. The "No. 1 prospect for liberalism in the country" was greeted by Washington liberals as a man who, as *The New Republic* said, "has a well-knit liberal philosophy and a powerful urge to right wrongs"—as a politician whose beliefs were so firmly held that he was willing to fight for them without compromise, and who, in the face of long odds, could win.

The subject of the cover story considered this image accurate. His victory at the Convention had apparently made him believe that his ideals could become reality without compromise. In his autobiography, "The Education of a Public Man," published in 1976, Humphrey recalled his feelings after the Democratic Convention: "I had taken on our establishment and won. It was a heady feeling. But it confirmed something I felt and hoped. You *could* stand for a principle in politics and you could move an unwilling party toward a necessary goal."

But in the next sentence of that autobiography Hubert Humphrey wrote, "How slowly and with what difficulty you kept it moving I was yet to learn."

It was the Senate that taught him.

Hubert Humphrey came to Washington confident that he could defeat the establishment there as he had defeated the establishment at the Convention—so confident, in fact, that his stridency, always annoying to new acquaintances until they had had a chance to discern the sincerity and passion beneath it, was at its most irritating.

Arriving in the capital to be greeted by journalists' predictions that, despite the liberal victory, Congress would again stall civil-rights legislation, the freshman Senator called a press conference (a well-attended press conference) to inform reporters that "there are enough votes in Congress" to pass the legislation "if [members] are honest and sincere—and I warn them that if they are not honest and sincere they may have trouble in the future." Friends tried to facilitate Humphrey's entrée to the capital's Democratic establishment, and took him to lunch with one of its pillars, the influential attorney Jim Rowe, at the august Metropolitan Club. "My God, I was shocked," Rowe recalled. "This guy was just awful. He talked all the time. He knew everything about everything." Dining at a nearby table was the *Times* columnist Arthur Krock, and, when Rowe pointed him out to the newcomer, Humphrey said that Krock was always too hard on civil-rights advocates. But now, Humphrey said, he had arrived in Washington and "I'll knock his block off." When Krock wrote a column criticizing him, he replied in a letter to the *Times* which attacked the columnist by name, as well as "the unholy alliance of the Republican party with the conservative wing of the Democratic party." Even worse, he showed up at the Senate Dining Room one day with a black member of his staff, Cyril King, and when the headwaiter, himself a black man, told them they could not be served, Humphrey, first softly, and then loudly and angrily, kept insisting that he and King were going to eat together, until at last they were allowed to do so. And worse still, he accepted the national chairmanship of the A.D.A., an organization regarded by the "unholy alliance" with hatred and scorn—accepted it because, as he later said, he felt that by doing so "I would be more than a freshman senator . . . I would become a national leader."

When Humphrey rose on the floor (much too soon, by Senate standards) to deliver his maiden speech, he chided the Senate for its slow pace ("Sometimes I think we become so cozy—we feel so secure in our six-year term—we forget that the people want things done") while supporting the proposal of James Murray, of Montana, for the creation of a Missouri Valley Authority that would be "a symbol of liberalism to the large majority of Americans who voted liberal last November and in other Novembers," because it would, in the words of Humphrey's biographer Carl Solberg, "do for the dust bowl what the Tennessee Valley Authority had done for the hillbilly hollows of the South." The Senate, whose new Majority Leader, Scott Lucas, was the man who in Philadelphia had called Humphrey a pipsqueak, responded in typical Senate fashion. The Senate referred the proposal to, and buried it in, committee, and either emasculated or killed bills embodying improvements in health care and the minimum wage, repeal of the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act, and other pledges made at the Democratic Convention. (As for the civil-rights bill, it didn't make it to the floor, either.)

There were also responses on a more personal level, responses for which Humphrey, unable to hold a grudge, was, as he later said, "unprepared." (Although he might have been prepared, given the fury still raging against him in the South; an editorial in the Dothan, Alabama, *Register* said, "His name is anathema. It will remain for history to tag him as the demagog he is.")

Scott Lucas, Humphrey was to realize, "still had not forgiven me for Philadelphia"—and neither had the Southerners who had placed Lucas in the Majority Leadership. Humphrey's requested committee assignments were Foreign Relations and Agriculture. Although there was no opening for a freshman on the former, there was one on the latter, and it might have seemed a logical one for Humphrey, since he was from an agricultural state. He was assigned, instead, to two of the least desirable committees, Government Operations and Post Office, and, in a peculiarly senatorial version of a covert sneer, he was, as Solberg put it, placed in "the juniormost seat on the Labor and Welfare Committee, whose ranking Republican member was Robert Taft, author of the law that Humphrey was committed to repeal." Moreover, as Humphrey was to say of Lucas, "The extra perks of office that he could deny, he did deny." Since Humphrey was deeply interested in foreign affairs, the Majority Leader appointed him to none of the many congressional delegations that travelled to foreign countries between sessions. Humphrey requested a seat on a new Select Committee on Small Business, but he was not one of the freshmen appointed to it—until Vice-President Barkley intervened. And Barkley could do nothing about a dozen other slights Lucas managed to inflict. Humphrey despised Lucas (who, he was to say, "of course, always voted with us on civil rights" in the Senate "because it wasn't going to pass anyway"). As he had proved in Philadelphia, he could defeat Lucas in open combat, but in the Senate nothing was open.

There were other personal responses particularly hurtful to a man of Humphrey's open and gregarious nature. The Senate was a convivial place, a place of pats on the back and hearty handshakes and warm, welcoming smiles, of banter and friendly exchanges, but there were few pats and handshakes for Hubert Humphrey, and few smiles, either. Paul Douglas would smile, of course, and Estes Kefauver, of Tennessee, and Jim Murray, but not other senators, including the most influential, the ones who were the center of the chatting groups in the Democratic cloakroom or on the Senate floor. When Humphrey walked into the cloakroom or out onto the floor, these men would often turn away, just slightly but enough to discourage conversation. It began to be noticeable that he was, in fact, being snubbed outright by the Southerners and many of their allies.

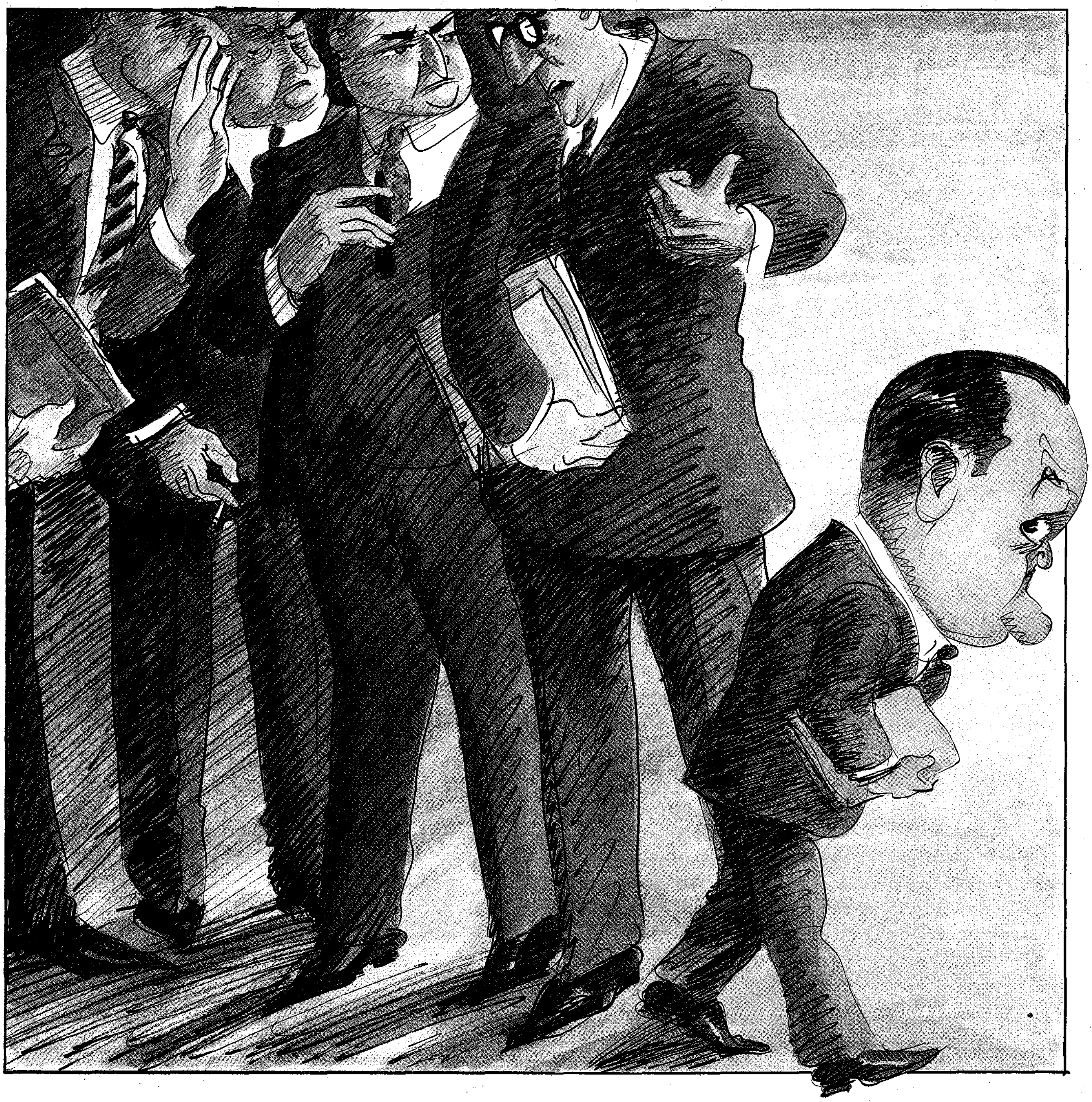
There were also responses more hurtful than snubs: sotto-voce comments about him, little jokes. Once, when Humphrey, still a freshman, was speaking again on the Senate floor, William Jenner, of Indiana, whispered that Humphrey reminded him of some tomatoes he had once planted "too early in the spring and the frost got them." Some of the whispers got back to Humphrey.

And there were remarks pitched loudly enough for Humphrey to hear. One afternoon, he was to recall, "I walked from the Senate chamber past a group of Southern senators. They ignored me and I moved silently on, but not out of earshot, and one of them, Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, said, obviously for my benefit: 'Can you imagine the people of Minnesota sending that damn fool down here to represent them?' "

Late in 1949, staff members of the Joint Committee on the Reduction of Nonessential Federal Expenditures, chaired by the conservative Virginian Harry Byrd, quietly "analyzed" the cost of every bill that Humphrey had introduced in the 1949 session, came up with inflated estimates that put the total at thirty billion dollars, and leaked the figures to the right-wing columnist Fulton Lewis, Jr., and to newspapers back in Minnesota. Republican senators then used the figures against Humphrey on the Senate floor, Kenneth Wherry, of Nebraska, saying sarcastically, "That is how he believes in economy." In retaliation, Humphrey introduced a resolution to abolish the Byrd committee, which, he charged, "is merely used as a publicity medium" by Byrd, its work virtually duplicating that of a Government Operations subcommittee. He added that its "very existence is a wanton waste and extravagance," and the appropriation for its staff and printing costs "stands as the No. 1 waste of the taxpayers' dollars."

Humphrey's charges had substance, as most of the Senate might privately have admitted—Byrd's committee had not even met since 1947—but a public attack by a junior senator on one of the pillars of the Senate club was a tactical mistake. And, in a violation of Senate protocol, Humphrey had unknowingly made the charge when Byrd was away from Washington, visiting his ailing mother. The counterattack came six days later, and when it began the Senate Chamber was, as one of Humphrey's biographers put it, "ominously full." Byrd's patrician accent had never been softer as the ruddy-faced Virginia apple grower begged the Senate's permission to "correct" some "misstatements" by Humphrey about his committee. When he had finished, he said, "I have mentioned nine misstatements in two thousand words. This is on average one misstatement in every two hundred and fifty words—and the Senator speaks like the wind." Byrd's drawl grew even more pronounced. "As the Senator from Minnesota is a publicity expert himself," he said, "his statement, although not intended as such, could be regarded as a compliment from one who welcomes and has been signally successful in creating publicity for himself and his objectives. If he has ever hid his light under a bushel, I am unaware of it. And I have not observed any indication that he is of the shrinking violet type evading publicity." The Senate in its wisdom could, if it so desired, abolish his committee, Harry Byrd said. If the Senate thought that best, he would not oppose so many colleagues whose opinion he deeply respected. But, he said, "I do not want it done as the result of misinformation such as that which has been presented to the Senate."

Byrd's attack, the journalist Albert Eisele wrote, was only "the initial salvo of a verbal barrage that has seldom been equalled in modern Senate history." One by one, Southern and conservative senators defended Byrd—and assailed his attacker in personal terms that verged on the vicious. Rising at his front-row desk and turning to stare directly at Humphrey, the stately Walter George, of



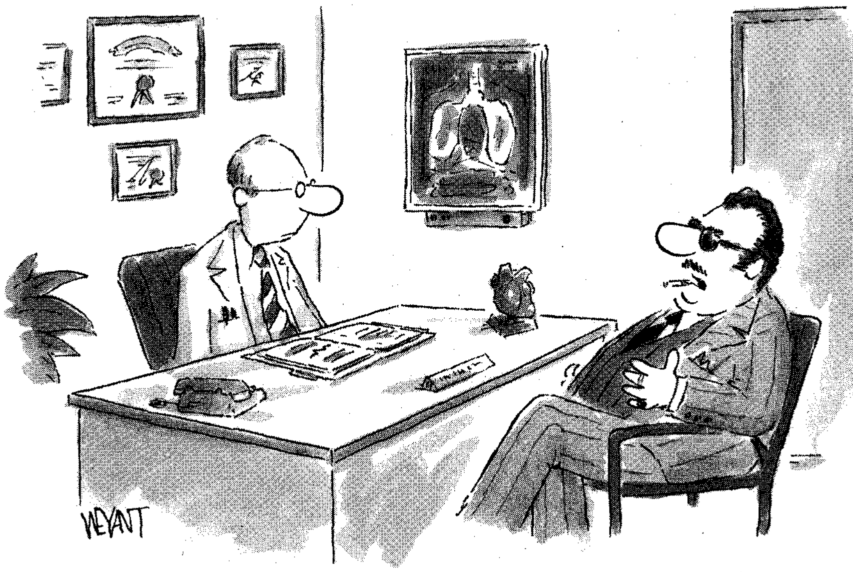
In the Senate, hostility toward Humphrey became more overt. He said, "I had nothing. Absolutely nothing. No friends anyplace."

Georgia, said that of course the Byrd committee should not be abolished. It was "doing a magnificent job." The attack on the committee was, he said, "the height of reckless irresponsibility."

Personal attacks were supposedly forbidden on the Senate floor, and Humphrey tried repeatedly to get the floor to make that point, or to respond, but J. William Fulbright, of Arkansas, in the chair, refused to recognize him, and Humphrey finally gave up, and sat slumped at his back-row desk as one after another of his colleagues assailed him. When, after four hours, Byrd's allies finally yielded the floor, Humphrey rose to reply. As he did so, Byrd and every one of his supporters turned their backs on him and strode out of the Chamber.

The hostility to him became increasingly overt. Following an angry debate in the radio studio in the Senate Office Building, during which Homer Capehart, of Indiana, had called him a Communist sympathizer, Capehart tried to shove him out the door. Humphrey was only stopped from punching the burly Indianan by an aide, who wrestled him away. When news of this undignified display was brought to the cloakroom, Vice-President Barkley knew immediately who was to blame, and made a crack, playing on the names of Minnesota's senior senator, Edward Thye, and of the defeated Joseph Ball, and within minutes Barkley's mot was circulating all over the Capitol: "Minnesota is a great state—first they send us their Ball, then they send us their Thye, and now they've sent us their goddam ass."

Such remarks, which invariably seemed to make their way to Hubert Humphrey's ears, would be seared into his memory. Talking to an interviewer in 1971, a quarter of a century later, he could



"So, Doc, what would it take to make my little 'problem' disappear?"

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still recall how he had felt when he heard Richard Russell call him a "damn fool"; "I just felt sick. . . . This hurt me more than anything in my private or public life, anything." Humphrey called those first years in the Senate "the most miserable period of my life." They were, he said, "dark days. . . . I despaired." "Despair" was a word that Humphrey, in the last years of his life, used frequently in describing those first years in the Senate, along with "bitter" and, most of all, "lonely." He "just couldn't believe" the way he was treated, he would say. "I was prepared for the normal political opposition you could expect to encounter," and of course he was aware of the South's anger at his Convention speech, but "I always worked on the basis that when the election was over you didn't hate anybody, and you sort of shook hands and you went to work." And, he would say, "I was a more than normally gregarious person, who wanted to be liked. I wanted to do well, and I knew that my political intensity, my personal enthusiasm, needed a friendly environment to blossom. I didn't feel any comradeship, any friendship. Nobody showed us"—Humphrey and his wife, Muriel—"around. . . . We didn't go to many parties and the few we went to weren't very helpful." He envied other freshmen senators, like Johnson. "They had friends in the South," he was to say. "That's all you needed. I had nothing. Absolutely nothing. No friends anyplace."

At the time, of course, he tried not to let his hurt show. "I hated to expose my feelings." And, except to his wife ("Without Muriel, I might have given up. . . . She was never too tired to listen"), he didn't let his hurt show. His broad smile was always in place in public. But in the evening, after a day in the Senate, he would get into his old Buick and drive home to Chevy Chase. And, driving home, he would cry: Hubert Humphrey, the youngest, and perhaps the best, mayor in the history of Minneapolis; Hubert Humphrey, who had brought a Democratic Convention to its feet with the greatest speech since the Cross of Gold; Hubert Humphrey, as brave as any David who ever faced a Goliath, driving up Connecticut Avenue in the stream of rush-hour cars with tears running down his face.

During his first two years in the Senate, Humphrey later said, "Johnson and I had virtually no contact, reflecting, I suppose, the general attitude of the senators toward me." Johnson's attitude toward him was, in fact, distinctly chilly. Then, one day in the spring of 1951, Humphrey came out of the underground door of the Senate Office Building to catch the little Senate subway to the Capitol, and Johnson and his aide George Reedy were standing on the platform. During the ride, the two senators sat together, and Reedy, to his surprise, heard Johnson speaking warmly to Humphrey. As Reedy was to recall, Johnson said, "Hubert, you have no idea what a wonderful experience it is for me to ride to the Senate Chamber with you in the morning. There are so many ways that I envy you. You are articulate; you have such a vast field of knowledge; you have command of such a huge flow of words; you can speak with such absolute logic." And then, in what Reedy describes as "a sudden change of voice," Johnson said harshly, "But God damn it, Hubert, why can't you be something but a gramophone for the N.A.A.C.P.? God damn it, Hubert, why can't you make a speech about labor for once? God damn it, Hubert, why can't you make a speech about farmers?" And Johnson ended by saying, "God damn it, Hubert, why can't you do something for all those people *and* the N.A.A.C.P. besides talking about them? You're spending so much time making speeches that there is no time left to get anything done." Reedy does not record Humphrey's reaction to the harshness, but it evidently reinforced whatever it was that Lyndon Johnson's reckoning eye had seen in him. It was in the spring of 1951 that, Humphrey would recall, "he started to show some interest in me. . . . He didn't treat me as if I were a pariah." He began, in fact, "to invite me to his office for talks and frequently for a drink."

"I found him a fascinating individual right from the beginning," Humphrey recalled. "A marvelous conversationalist in private conversation. . . . Told a lot of stories, a lot of human interest stuff. He had been close to Roosevelt, who was my political hero. And he knew the operations of the House, and he knew all the personalities. He was a great mimicker, too, you know. And he knew all the little things that people did." To hear Hubert Humphrey recall those talks in Room 231 of the Senate Office Building is to hear a man utterly charmed by Lyndon Johnson.

Charmed—and impressed. Humphrey had a master's degree in political science, and had been the mayor of a major American city, but in these conversations he was learning a political science that couldn't be learned in college, or in City Hall. Alongside Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey was only a student, and he knew it. A note he wrote Johnson at the time says, "I am learning a great deal from you. You're one teacher who makes a fellow like what he is being taught."

Some of the lessons that Johnson taught about politics were pragmatic. "Johnson said the first lesson of politics is to be able to count," Humphrey recalled. "I have never forgotten that." Some were about personalities. "From the very beginning, it seemed to me, he understood the most intricate workings of the Senate. It seemed that he got there aware of the backgrounds of most of the members, and he took the trouble to find out about the ones he didn't know about. He was like . . . a psychiatrist. He didn't stop until he knew how to appeal to every single senator and how to win him over." Some of the lessons were at a higher level. With every conversation, it seemed, Hubert Humphrey was becoming increasingly aware that Lyndon Johnson was operating on a level of politics of which he himself had been only dimly aware. "He knew Washington, and he knew Congress as no other man in my experience. He understood the structure and pressure points of the government, and the process and problems of legislation. He understood . . . the appointed officials. He knew how to appeal to their vanity, to their needs, to their ambitions. He knew the satellite worlds of Washington: the business lobbyists, the labor movement, the farm and rural-electrification lobbyists, the people interested in health research and social security."

"I was always fascinated by his knowledge of politics," Humphrey was to say. "If you liked politics, it was like being at the feet of a giant."

Humphrey was impressed not only by Johnson's politics but by his personality. The words and phrases with which he describes that personality—words and phrases sprinkled through Humphrey's autobiography, and through the texts of interviews he gave to writers and to oral-history interviewers—reveal an admiration that verges on awe.

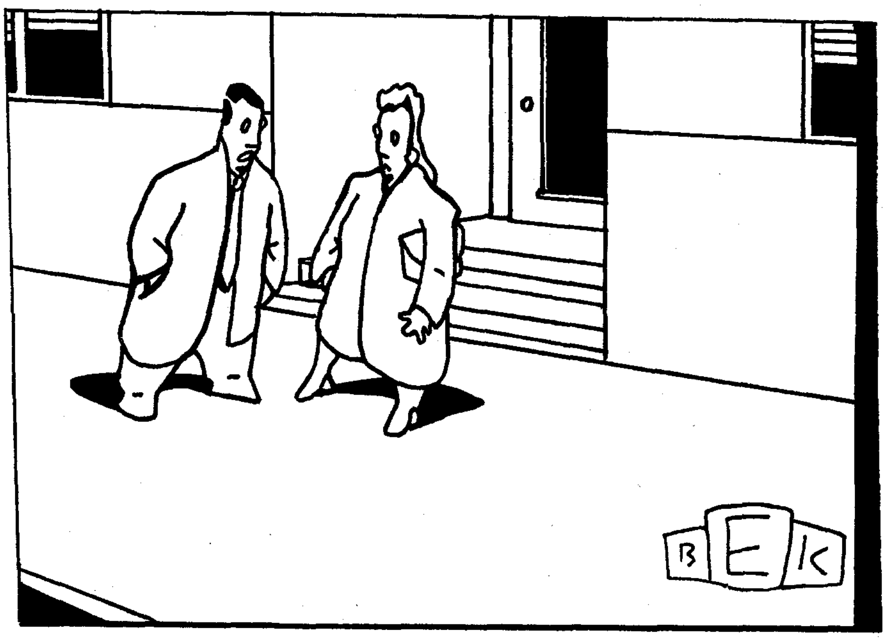
"Big" is a word that recurs frequently in these descriptions. "You have just almost got to see the man," Humphrey says. "He'd get right up on you. He'd just lean right in on you, you know. Your nose would only be about—he was so big and tall he'd be kind of looking down on you, you see." "He was like a plant reaching out for water," Humphrey says. "Like a tree. And his whole demeanor was one great big long reach." He talks about Johnson's hands—"those great big hands of his. I can still see him clap them." Recalling Johnson's use of Texas Hill Country maxims to make a point, Humphrey says, "One of his favorite expressions—he'd say, 'If you're going to kill a snake with a hoe, you have to get it with one blow at the head.' And he'd give a dramatic demonstration of what he meant with his hands, those hands that were just like a couple of great big shovels coming down."

"Strong" is another word that recurs frequently—along with words that are evocations of strength. "This fellow is a very strong man, strong willed, strong of body," he says of Johnson. "He was a muscular, glandular, political man."

Humphrey describes Johnson as subtle. "He was a born political lover. It's a most amazing thing. Many people look upon Johnson as the heavy-handed man. That's not really true. He was sort of like a cowboy making love." He describes him as fierce: "a lion . . . clever, fast and furious when he needed to be and kind and placid when he needed to be." He describes him as an elemental force of nature. "He'd come on just like a tidal wave sweeping all over the place. He went through walls. He'd come through a door, and he'd take the whole room over. Just like that. Everything." In describing Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey paints with his own words—unwittingly, perhaps, but vividly—a portrait of two strong personalities in interplay, and of one coming more and more under the spell of the other.

Of all Johnson's qualities, none impressed Humphrey more than the fact that "Johnson always was able to take the measure of a man. He knew those that he could dominate; he knew those that he could outmaneuver. Right off the bat he sized you up."

Did Lyndon Johnson "size up" Hubert Humphrey? Were these talks behind the closed door of Johnson's office a perusal, a studying—a reading, by a master reader of men, of a challenging text? It is possible that Johnson never had a more challenging text to read, for the interplay between him and Humphrey was complicated. It was, after all, not only Johnson whose life was fired by ambition; that quality was blazoned as boldly as idealism across Humphrey's life; with his characteristic frankness, he had once asked a group of Minneapolis supporters, "What's so un-American about being ambitious? Of course I'm ambitious." Both men were, in fact, fired by the same ambition; reaching for the same distant goal. The A.D.A.'s Joe Rauh, who first met Humphrey in 1947, recalls, "From the moment we met, he was talking about how he was going to be President someday." Jim Rowe, who during Johnson's



"I want to go back to how things were before we knew each other."

early days in Washington spent more time with him than did any of the other young New Dealers, said, "From the day he got here, he wanted to be President." That great goal was to glimmer before Humphrey, always out of his reach but always to be sought for, throughout his life. He made three all-out tries for the Presidency—in 1960; in 1968, when he received the Democratic nomination and almost won the election; and in 1972—and he was set to make a fourth try, in 1976, when the realization was borne in on him that he was about to be defeated this time by cancer. These two men, almost the same age, never took their eye from the same target. It was not only Lyndon Johnson who was so driven that his quest was filled with an "energy" that made other men, even men of great energy, marvel. And, if Lyndon Johnson was strong, what was the man Paul Douglas had been moved to liken to the Bible's heroic David?

Hubert Horatio Humphrey, a spindly youngster with a sunny smile and a strikingly open, bright cheerfulness that, according to someone who knew him, "made you feel good when he was around," was the son of a small-town druggist who struggled to make a living in a series of the little towns that dot the windswept prairies of Minnesota and South Dakota; Hubert got himself to college, but then was forced to drop out for six years and work behind the counter to help his father survive in a Depression-ravaged area where their farmer-customers had no money to pay their bills; he eventually returned to graduate and then, through sheer determination, get a master's degree. And as mayor of Minneapolis he was uncompromising in ramming through measures for social justice: when even the publisher of the city's leading black newspaper urged him to drop his fight for a municipal Fair Employment Practices Commission because of the bitterness it was engendering, he replied, "To hell with that, it's right and it's going through"; while he was mayor, a mayor who hung two big portraits of Franklin Roosevelt in his office, Minneapolis became not only the first city with an effective F.E.P.C. but the first city to offer free chest X-rays to those who couldn't pay for them. And he was so tough in ending police brutality toward blacks and union strikers that when he died Thurgood Marshall, the Supreme Court Justice, said that, of all Hubert Humphrey's achievements, none had impressed him more than "what he did with the police." When Humphrey and Johnson sat talking in Johnson's office, it was not only the Texan whose life was a study in determination and strength of will.

Challenging though the text may have been, however, Johnson read it—and made use of what he read.

It is possible to know why Lyndon Johnson befriended Hubert Humphrey, for in later years Johnson boasted about the use he had made of him, and had George Reedy write a memorandum to Richard Russell explaining why Johnson should continue to stay close to Humphrey, a memo that spelled out, in considerable detail, Humphrey's usefulness to him.

Johnson saw that were he to become Democratic Leader, Humphrey, if he came to like him and trust him, would be the bridge he needed to the Northern liberals, since they acknowledged the Minnesotan (as much as they acknowledged any man) as their own leader. He might, indeed, be the only bridge possible; as the Reedy memo put it, "Senator Humphrey is about the only force that is able to control the [liberal] extremists."

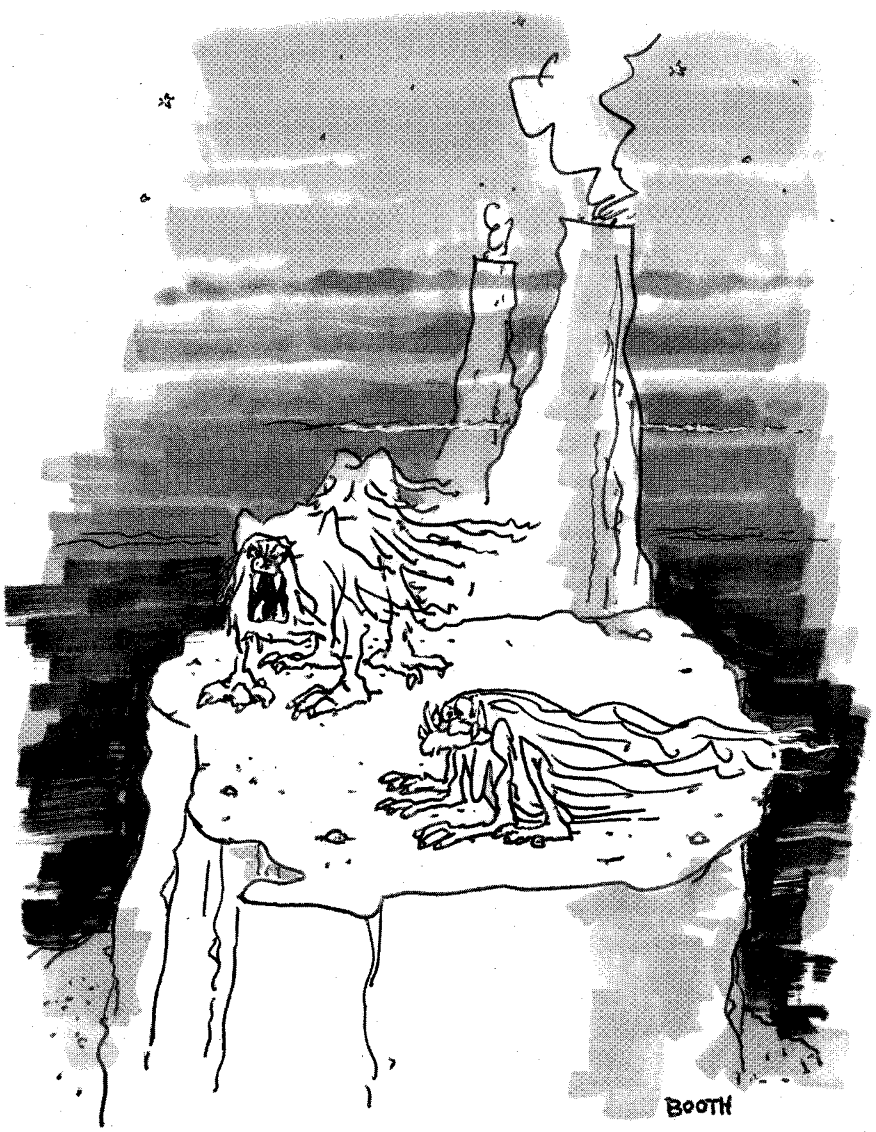
Johnson wanted, in fact, to use Humphrey as an emissary between the two senatorial camps—a necessity for a Leader to have a chance of success. Such an emissary, to be effective, would have to believe, first, that compromise was desirable and, second, that it was possible. He would have to believe that at bottom there existed some common ground between Lyndon Johnson and the liberals, that their aims were not, after all, totally dissimilar. Reedy wrote that there was a reason that Humphrey, seemingly so uncompromising, might be such an instrument: he believed deeply and sincerely in what he was fighting for, and therefore victory in the fight was very important to him. "There are compulsions upon Senator Humphrey—both of conscience and of constituency—which force him to lead civil rights fights. But he is not going to win a civil rights fight by splitting the Democratic Party. The only way he can win the fight is to drum up enough votes on his side and soften the opposition of the other side."

Johnson wanted Humphrey not only to bring Southern and Northern Senate blocs closer together but to bring *him*, Lyndon Johnson, closer to the Northern senators. To become President, Johnson needed the North. Viewing him as a typical Southern conservative, however, Northern liberals, even those who were beginning to like him personally, still deeply distrusted his philosophy and aims. He needed the liberal senators to at least feel they could work with him; he needed them to be convinced that at bottom they shared some of the same goals.

And last, and perhaps most important, what Lyndon Johnson wanted in his dealings with Hubert Humphrey was to modulate that great voice. Of all the liberals who could rise on the Senate floor and embarrass—humiliate, in the Johnsonian lexicon—a Democratic Leader by demanding that he pass liberal legislation that he was in fact not able to pass, no one could do so nearly as eloquently and effectively as Humphrey. No senator could enunciate liberal aims more persuasively, could arouse liberal emotions more dramatically, could mobilize national liberal opinion against a Senate Leader more effectively than that mighty orator from the plains, and Johnson knew it. "Other 'ultra-liberals' can go off like a firecracker without materially affecting the situation in the Democratic Party," the Reedy memorandum said. "But when Senator Humphrey goes, if followed through to the end, it would split the Party." Humphrey had to be brought to Johnson's side.

And Johnson, who was capable of making every man his tool, knew how to use Humphrey to attain the ends he wanted. Was there, shining out of that text, ambition? Knowing now that Humphrey wanted the same thing that he did, wanted it perhaps almost as badly as he did, Johnson used that knowledge—used it so skillfully that the intensity of Humphrey's ambition would serve only to make him a better tool for realizing Johnson's ambition. Since a rapprochement with the liberals would strengthen Johnson's position in a run for the Presidency, and Humphrey was of course smart enough to see this, Johnson needed to make Humphrey believe that ultimately it would be to his own benefit for Johnson's position to be strengthened. For Humphrey to believe that, he had to believe that Johnson was no threat to his Presidential dreams, and that in fact building up Johnson's support would wind up helping him more than Johnson. And Johnson made him believe that.

The exact words he employed we do not know, for there is no record of these conversations. But we do know the general nature of the arguments he employed—for Humphrey believed them and later repeated them to others. Johnson understood that there was no point in trying to convince a man as intelligent as Hubert Humphrey that Johnson didn't want the Presidency. Instead, Johnson acknowledged to Humphrey that he wanted the Presidency but said he knew he would never get it—and he convinced Humphrey that he would never get it, explaining to him, with apparently deep conviction, why no one from the South could be President. And he convinced Humphrey as well that therefore it was to Humphrey's advantage to build up Johnson as a candidate, make him as strong a candidate as possible, because his strength would eventually go to whomever Johnson wanted—and, so long as he and Johnson were allies, it would eventually go to him. In November, 1958, Humphrey, believing this, explained the reasoning in a strictly off-the-record conversation with Robert Manning, then a reporter for *Time*, who summarized Humphrey's feelings in a confidential memo to his editors: "Nobody can love politics as much as Johnson does, and not want to be President," but "for all his political sagacity and influence on party affairs, and even if he guns for it, he's not repeat not going to be nominated." In fact, Humphrey explained to Manning, Johnson's ambition would end up helping him, Hubert Humphrey, receive the nomination, since "Johnson votes"—the votes from Southern states—"could very well determine who else gets [the] nomination," and those votes "could very well go to Humphrey, who may be closest to Lyndon of all major Senate wheels."



"Which side of the butte do you want?"

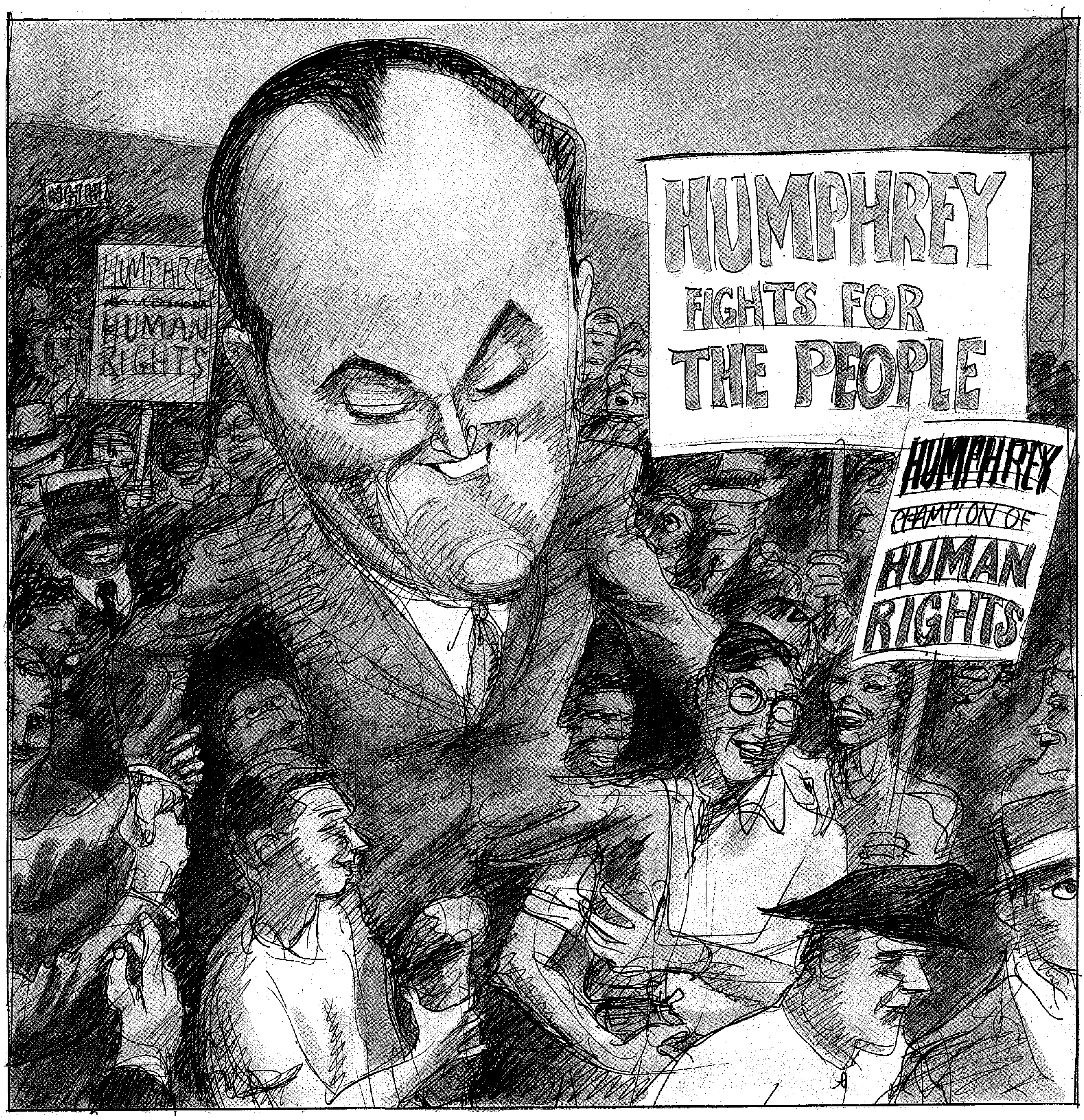
During those private chats in Room 231, Johnson was not the only one of the two young senators who was trying to use the other. If Johnson needed the North in order to be elected President, and saw Humphrey as a means to obtaining it, so did Humphrey need the South—and saw Johnson as a means of obtaining it. And Johnson made sure that Humphrey kept seeing him that way. Carl Solberg, the author of the most thoroughly documented biography of Humphrey, concludes that in his dealings with Johnson Humphrey was thinking that although Johnson might be under the impression that he was using him, in reality he was using Johnson.

Was there, *shining out of that text*, idealism? Personal admiration—awe, even—could never be a decisive influence with a man who believed as deeply in principles, in moral goals, as did Hubert Humphrey. "Our little group of twenty-five or so liberal senators"—the number was actually more like seventeen or eighteen—"were very suspicious of Johnson, in those early years, very suspicious of him!" Humphrey recalled. *He* was very suspicious of Johnson. In order for him to ally himself with Johnson, he would have to be convinced that the alliance would not involve any betrayal of principle—that, in fact, the alliance would improve the chances for realization of those goals.

Humphrey's recollections of the conversations in Room 231 give some hint of the methods Johnson employed to make him believe that they shared the same principles. One was for Johnson to identify himself with the President who to

Humphrey had been the supreme embodiment of these principles. Like the great storyteller he was, Johnson brought alive those two paintings of Roosevelt on Humphrey's office wall, talking endlessly about the one-on-one breakfasts he'd had with F.D.R. when, as a young congressman, he had been the President's protégé. Humphrey could never get enough of these stories, and to him they did indeed validate Johnson's liberalism. "Johnson was a Roosevelt man," Humphrey recalled. "That was his greatest joy, to remind people that Roosevelt looked upon him as his protégé. A hundred times I heard him mention that, you know. That was his great moment." "This made him in a sense, in his contacts with many people like myself, as a sort of New Dealer," Humphrey said. Johnson also talked about Benjamin V. Cohen and Thomas (Tommy the Cork) Corcoran and other almost legendary New Dealers with whom he was friends. "David Dubinsky was another one of his heroes, and the I.L.G.W.U., and how he and David always worked together." And Johnson also talked, as only Lyndon Johnson could talk, about the episodes in his life in which he had fought for the things in which liberals believed—about fighting the private utilities to bring electricity to the Texas Hill Country, about the months he had spent teaching impoverished Mexican-American children in the little South Texas town of Cotulla. "I knew he was very sympathetic to the Mexican-Americans," Humphrey said. "Johnson never forgot that he was a schoolteacher down there."

Humphrey could see with his own eyes that Richard Russell also regarded Lyndon Johnson as his protégé, that the senators with whom Johnson was on the most intimate terms were the Southern-



Civil rights "is the issue of the twentieth century," Humphrey said. "We must not turn back from the path so plainly before us."

ers, but Humphrey felt, after those talks with Johnson, that he understood that. "Johnson never was a captive of the Southern bloc," he said. "He was trying to be a captain of them, rather than a captive. . . . He was, I think, biding his time, so to speak, and building his contacts." Humphrey was not yet fully convinced of Johnson's liberalism, but he was convinced that there was much more liberalism in his new friend than he had previously believed.

Was Johnson also reading in Humphrey his loneliness, the loneliness of a gregarious man who was shunned in the Senate? Of all the things that Lyndon Johnson made Hubert Humphrey believe, in these early stages of their relationship, one of the most important was that he was his friend.

Johnson liked him, Humphrey would say, he was sure of it: "We were hitting it off." Looking back at those Senate years in 1971, from a very different vantage point, he said, "I really believe that Lyndon Johnson looked upon me—I've tried to think about this even after the Vice-Presidency and all—I think it's fair to say that he liked me as an individual, as a human being." He thought he understood why. "Johnson had a sense of humor, and he could kid with me," he said. "Johnson didn't enjoy talking with the liberals. He didn't think they had a sense of humor." And there was in Johnson's attitude an implicit assumption that they were comrades-in-arms, friends fighting for the same cause. He not only showed Humphrey a mountaintop—which both of them would ascend (although because he, Johnson, was unlucky enough to be from Texas, Humphrey would rise higher)—but also showed him that they would be on the mountaintop together. Once, on the Senate floor shortly after one of the huge Democratic Jefferson-Jackson dinners, he told Humphrey in a low, confidential voice that he was tired of "the same old phonograph records of yesterday" which had been played at the dinner. "We've many fine governors and members of Congress, fresh faces, who weren't heard from," he said. "We need new voices. Someday we'll give our own party."

In letters that Johnson wrote to Humphrey from Texas during the long Senate recesses, he used over and over again the word Humphrey wanted to hear. "I have been sorely missing your wise advice and friendly counsel," he wrote in 1953. "I am looking forward to many more years of service with a good friend," he wrote in 1954. In a letter at a crucial point in their relationship, in 1956, he wrote assuring him, "You will be on the scene as a national leader long after the others are forgotten," and added, "I am proud to call [you] 'friend.' "

"You are a wonderful friend and I will never forget it," he wrote in 1957, and, also in 1957, "My deep thanks go to you for . . . being my everlasting friend."

Humphrey responded with the same word. "The privilege of your friendship is a priceless gift," he wrote. "Thanks so much for your warm words of friendship," he wrote.

There was one further key element in Humphrey's character that to Lyndon Johnson, to whom personality was all-important, may have been the most important element of all. At this stage of his career, Humphrey was almost universally regarded as a very strong man, strong and tough enough to have stood up to the South. But in Lyndon Johnson's eyes, while Hubert Humphrey may have been strong and tough, he wasn't strong enough or tough enough. Most significantly, he wasn't as strong, as tough, as he himself was.

At the core of Humphrey's character, as Johnson saw, was a fundamental sweetness, a gentleness, a reluctance to cause pain; a desire, if he fought with someone, to later seek a reconciliation, to let bygones be bygones, to shake hands and be friends again. And to Johnson that meant that at the bottom of Humphrey's character, beneath the strength and the ambition and the energy, there was weakness. Years later, he defined this crucial difference between them with Johnsonian vividness. At the time, they were both negotiating with the labor leader Walter Reuther, whose right arm had long been permanently crippled by a would-be assassin's gunshot. Reuther had come to Washington to meet with them individually, and Johnson told an assistant, "You know the difference between Hubert and me? When Hubert sits across from Reuther and Reuther's got that limp hand stuck in his pocket and starts talking . . . Hubert will sit there smiling away and thinking all the time, 'How can I get his hand out of his pocket so I can shake it?' " But when Reuther was sitting across from *him*, Lyndon Johnson said, "I'm sitting in my rocker, smiling and thinking all the time, 'How can I get that hand out of his pocket—so I can cut his balls off!' "

Hubert Humphrey was trying to use Johnson, just as Johnson was trying to use Humphrey. Johnson knew that. But he knew something else, too. If two men were each trying to use the other, the tougher one would win—and he, Lyndon Johnson, was the tougher.

Johnson began, although he was still only Assistant Leader, to prepare the way for the time when, as Leader, he would be able to make use of what he had learned about his new ally. Of all the political-science lessons taught in Room 231, the most important, for the teacher's purpose, was about the need for compromise. To convince Humphrey of the importance of compromise, Johnson played on one of the Minnesotan's deepest desires: his wish not only to fight for social justice but to win; to help, instead of merely talking about helping, the poor and underprivileged, the "People! Human beings!" that he saw as the main issue of the twentieth century. Johnson was playing on Humphrey's desire for genuine accomplishment.

As Humphrey later related, Johnson would often telephone him in his office at about seven-thirty in the evening. "Hubert, come over. There's something I want to talk to you about," he would say. If Humphrey protested that his family was waiting, Johnson would say, "Damn it, Hubert, you've got to make up your mind whether you're going to be a good father or a good senator." And, when Humphrey arrived, Johnson would, evening after evening, play variations on the same theme. "Your speeches are accomplishing nothing," he would say. Humphrey should learn to compromise. "Otherwise you'll suffer the fate of those crazies, those bomb-thrower types like Paul Douglas, Wayne Morse, Herbert Lehman. You'll be ignored, and get nothing accomplished you want." Humphrey, the man who had refused to compromise, came not only to believe this—"Compromise is not a dirty word," he would say; "the Constitution itself represents the first great national compromise"—but to believe it with all the fervor of the convert, the convert who is the most enthusiastic of believers. Not only, he was to say, was compromise not a dirty word; those who refuse to compromise are a threat; "the purveyors of perfection," as he came to call them, "are dangerous when they . . . move self-righteously to dominate. There are those who live by the strict rule that whatever they think right is necessarily right. They will compromise on nothing. . . . These rigid minds, which arise on both the left and the right, leave no room for other points of view, for differing human needs. . . . Pragmatism is the better method." Although the fact that some of his fellow liberal senators came to look upon him as, in his own words, one of the "unprincipled compromisers" bothered him for a while, "it doesn't bother me any more at all," he said. "I felt that it was important that we inch along, even if we couldn't gallop along, at least that we trot a little bit."

CUSTODY WARS

One seed of chaos had been lost
in the Motar Galaxy.
If it was not found
the infinite stars
would all implode.

The children sat rigid
in pajamas, transfixed
in that constant shifting gleam:
at their feet a heap of dolls,
dinosaurs, skeletons, small gods,
a king with a key in his spine,
a mound of unopened bills,
roach motels, a little wedge
of mouse poison, gnawed at the lid,

and I stood behind them
becoming used to darkness.
The known stars drew back
like a curtain opening,
and swiftly we entered
deep space, pure waiting,
each bound by a cold ray,
each with a finger to his lips,

while in another room a phone
pealed—perhaps the final offer—
faint as all the charms of earth.

—*D. Nurkse*

The conversations in Room 231 were, in a way, a test—a test (of which Humphrey was evidently unaware) of whether Humphrey could and would be the means to Johnson's ends—and Humphrey evidently passed. Slowly but steadily, Johnson began to move Humphrey into a position where he could one day be a bridge between liberals and conservatives, an instrument of compromise.

During the 1951 session, Johnson began telling Walter George, "Senator, Hubert isn't such a bad fellow, you know." He told George how interested Humphrey was in foreign affairs. When Humphrey walked into the cloakroom, Johnson would bring him over to George's armchair and begin discussing foreign affairs; Humphrey by this time had realized the necessity of listening when George was pontificating, and he listened. And, when he himself occasionally interjected a thought, George listened, too; it was difficult to be in a conversation with Hubert Humphrey and not be aware of his intelligence. And of his warmth; the more Walter George saw of Humphrey, the more he began, despite himself, to like him. Simultaneously, Johnson was working on Russell, pointing out to him that Humphrey's views on agriculture were remarkably like Russell's own. "The South and the Midwest have always been together on farm legislation," Humphrey would say. "We needed each other." Occasionally, when Johnson invited Humphrey over for a drink and a talk, Russell would be there, too. Then Johnson told Russell that Hubert would appreciate having his opinion on an agricultural bill he wanted to introduce. "Humphrey utilized this opportunity to show deference by his repeated 'Sir' to Russell when they discussed the measure," Johnson's biographer Alfred Steinberg relates. Russell, too, as the longtime U.P.I. Senate correspondent John A. Goldsmith put it, in a book he wrote about the Johnson-Russell relationship, "came to appreciate Humphrey's intelligence." And he came to appreciate his sincerity; Russell had a passion to help the poor farmers of the South, Humphrey had a passion to help the poor farmers of the Midwest, and this shared passion brought them a little closer together. And always Johnson was putting in a good word for Hubert with Russell.

"Johnson was actually becoming a bridge for me with some of the more conservative members of the Senate," Humphrey later said. Their feelings about him had eased to the point that Russell Long, of Louisiana, his neighbor in Chevy Chase, felt able to bring him one day to the communal table in the senators' private dining room. "Since there was seldom talk of issues or legislation, lunch was usually a relaxed social hour of storytelling, chatter about the sports page, whatever was not political or controversial," Humphrey said. The Southern senators started to get to know Humphrey not as a fighter for civil rights but as a human being. And, like most people who got to know Humphrey, they liked him. And Humphrey knew who had got them to like him. "My apprenticeship of isolation drew to a close as I got to know Lyndon Johnson," he was to say; it was Johnson who brought even "Dick Russell around to look with some favor upon me." He knew that his relationship with the Southerners—his key to acceptance in the Senate, to the end of his time as a "pariah"—was due to Lyndon Johnson. He knew that Johnson had given him a great gift. And, being an intelligent man, he knew that what had been given could be taken away.

If in 1951 and 1952 Hubert Humphrey was charmed and impressed by Lyndon Johnson, friends with him and eager to stay his friend, he was nevertheless still the dominant figure in the Senate's liberal bloc and not at all disposed to relinquish that role. His loyalty to that bloc was as undivided as ever. On many controversial issues, his views and those of Johnson and the conservatives were not similar, and for the moment Johnson didn't try to modify his views. Nor did Johnson make any attempts during those two years, the years when he was only Assistant Leader, to make use of Humphrey's new understanding of the virtues of compromise. While during those years Johnson, as Doris Kearns Goodwin puts it, "seemed to foresee that someday Humphrey might be useful to him," that day had not yet come.

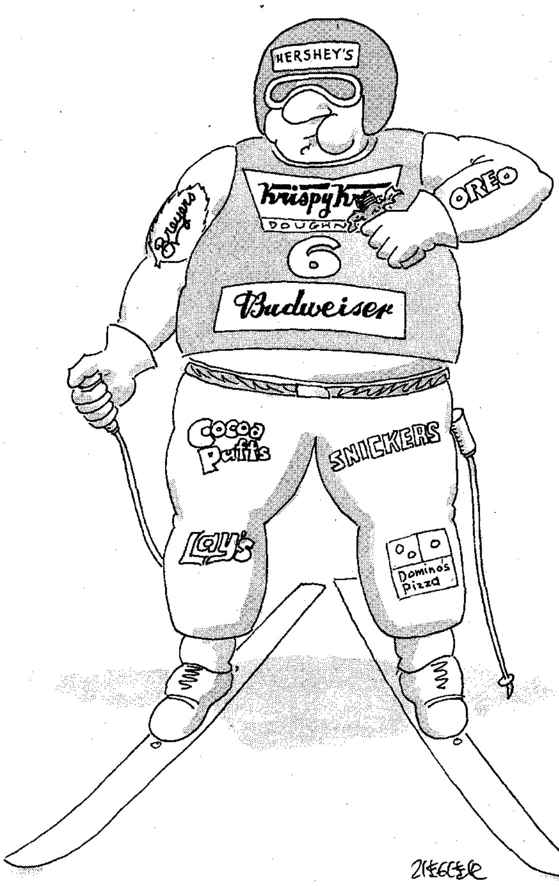
Then, in November, 1952, the Senate Democratic Leader, Ernest McFarland, of Arizona, was defeated for reëlection, and Johnson, although he was still in his first term, set out to replace him as Leader—Minority Leader, since the Democrats had lost control of the Senate. Johnson was only forty-four, and would therefore be by far the youngest senator in history to be elected either Majority or Minority Leader. (Neither party had ever before elected a Leader who was in his forties; the average age of the seven previous Democratic Leaders at the time of their elections was fifty-nine; the average age of the seven Republicans who had been elected before 1953 was sixty-one.) He had, moreover, been elected after only four years in the Senate. In an institution in which seniority was considered crucial in a senator's advancement, only once had a senator with less seniority—John Worth Kern, of Indiana, elected in 1913 at the age of sixty-three—been elected Leader. In a short time, with Russell supporting him, Johnson had lined up perhaps thirty of the forty-seven Democratic votes. But liberal senators, as Humphrey was to recall, were "upset by the prospect" of Johnson's election. On November 13th, Jim Rowe telephoned Johnson's office to warn him that "some of the liberals are getting ready to try to knife you" by nominating their own candidate when the Democratic caucus met, on January 2nd, to formally select a Leader.

"Humphrey wanted it . . . but Humphrey couldn't get the votes," the Senate staffer Bobby Baker was to recall. Fond though some of the Southern senators had become of him personally, that fondness would obviously not extend to supporting a civil-rights champion for Leader, so, as Humphrey himself realized, his candidacy was unfeasible. Humphrey was therefore asked to organize the liberals and find a candidate who could block Johnson.

The liberals settled on James Murray. The Montanan was seventy-six years old and frail, his step was increasingly uncertain. Murray had long been a courageous fighter for the New Deal, but his mind was no longer as strong as his heart, and more and more it dwelt in the past, although he was still capable, at least on most occasions, of holding his own on the Senate floor. And he was still a great favorite with the press, a noted New Deal "name." While his candidacy was not a genuine threat—Johnson already had more than the twenty-four votes needed for election as Leader—it could receive publicity, publicity that would work against Johnson's objective. A vote was a fight, and a fight not only meant newspaper stories, in which he would be labelled the Southern candidate, but also an increase in tensions that would later make unity harder to achieve. Johnson did not want a vote at the caucus at all.

The key to the unanimous vote he wanted was the liberal who was organizing the liberal forces, and who was giving no indication of quitting just because the fight was hopeless. "Hubert can't win," Johnson told Bobby Baker, as Baker recounts in his book, "Wheeling and Dealing," written with Larry L. King, "but I don't want him gumming up the works for me. If he fights to the bitter end, then I won't have a cut-dog's chance to be an effective leader. We can't have everybody squabbling. The Republicans would eat our lunch and the sack it came in."

Johnson sent Baker to "promise" Humphrey what Baker was to call "candy"—the candy that, from his reading of Humphrey, Johnson knew would



be sweetest to his taste. "I know that Senator Johnson will be looking to you as the spokesman for Senate liberals, and for the national constituency you're building," Baker told him. And, knowing also Humphrey's desire to be a member of the Senate "club," he offered him that candy, too. "I wouldn't be surprised if he brought you into the leadership circle," Baker said. And when that somewhat vague offer didn't produce the desired effect, Johnson made a more direct one himself. Telephoning Humphrey at home, he asked for his support, and, Humphrey relates, "I said I had already made a commitment and couldn't support him. He said he was sorry, in part because he was considering me for the minority whip job."

Charmed and awed though he may have been by Johnson, eager though he was for his friendship, Humphrey would not abandon his fellow-liberals. Despite this "exhilarating" offer, he tried to bargain with Johnson, telling him that the only way for him to obtain liberal support was to offer liberals additional seats on the Democratic Policy and Steering Committees. And the next day he and fellow-liberals Lester Hunt, of Wyoming, Herbert Lehman, of New York, and Paul Douglas came to Johnson's office "prepared to trade our support."

But Humphrey was trying to bargain with a Johnson who now, for the first time in their relationship, held all the cards. He had little patience with his visitors. After letting them talk—"briefly," to use Humphrey's word—he told them he wasn't going to bargain with them. "He wasn't in the mood to make concessions." In fact, he said, the talking was over. "I've got the votes in the caucus, and I'm not going to talk to you." And then, "politely but curtly," he "dismissed us." And then, as soon as Humphrey had returned to his own office from "that awful meeting," Johnson telephoned him and told him to come back alone—and, when he returned, Humphrey found himself in the presence of a different Lyndon Johnson from any he had seen before, not "quiet and gentle" but, in Humphrey's euphemistic phrase, "in a take-charge, no-nonsense mood," a Johnson whose tone was "stern" as he showed Humphrey that he had not yet fully absorbed the political lessons he had given him, and that he still had more lessons to learn.

"How many votes [for Murray] do you think you have?" Johnson asked, and when Humphrey replied, "Well, I think we have anywhere from thirteen to seventeen," Johnson "stared at me for a quiet moment and said, 'First of all, you ought to be sure of your count. That's too much of a spread. But you don't have them anyway. *Who* do you think you have?' "

Humphrey handed him a list of names, and Lyndon Johnson looked at it. "*He* isn't going to vote for him," he said. "*He* isn't, and *he* isn't. These fellows are going to vote for me."

"I can't believe that," Humphrey said, noting that the senators Johnson named had already promised him or Douglas that they would vote for Murray.

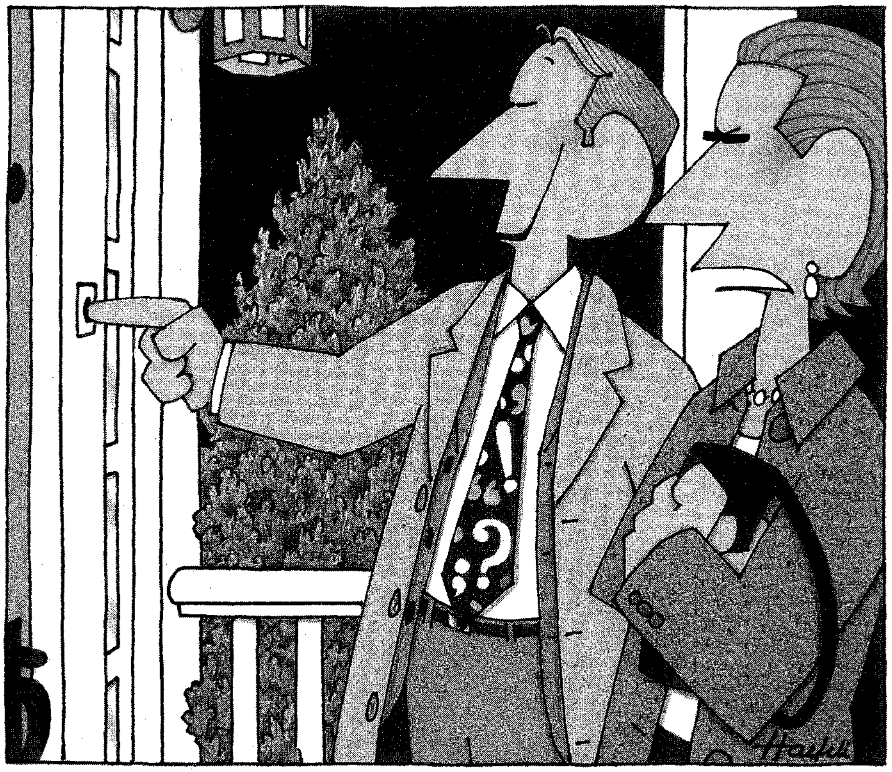
"Well, you'll find out," Johnson said. And then he said, "As a matter of fact, Senator Hunt, who was just in here with you, is going to vote for me."

At about ten o'clock in the morning on Friday, January 2, 1953, forty-four of the forty-seven Democrats in the Senate of the United States began filing into Room 201 of the Senate Office Building, on whose door a painter had, the previous day, changed the gold lettering from "Majority Conference" to "Minority Conference." Ernest McFarland called the caucus to order and said that the first order of business would be to elect his successor as Leader, and Richard Russell rose to nominate Lyndon Johnson, of Texas.

After Murray was nominated, the senators voted. Humphrey was to recall that "Senator Murray had his own vote and mine, plus three or four others," and those, despite the list in Humphrey's pocket and the promises he had received, were all he had. ("You were down here with Senator Hunt, and you see he voted for me," Johnson told him.) "You'll find out," Johnson had warned Humphrey—and now Humphrey had found out. "I'll never forget it," he later said. "He was just as right as day. They voted for Johnson."

And then, in a gesture that was to have important consequences for his later career, Hubert Humphrey quickly moved that Johnson's election be made unanimous without a formal vote, and it was.

Humphrey said later that he had made that motion because "Number One, I didn't want to have Murray embarrassed . . . by getting only a handful of votes from his colleagues." He said that "for an old gentleman that had been there all those years, that didn't look good at all." But that was only No. 1. Humphrey had learned a lot about Lyndon Johnson (although, as would in later years become



"Other men manage to confine whimsy to their boxers."

apparent, not nearly enough). He had seen that Johnson was not a man to forgive and forget, to let bygones be bygones, to tolerate opposition. He had seen in Johnson a determination to make opponents pay for their opposition, and pay dearly. And that last, "stern" interview—in that new, "take-charge" mood—had reinforced that insight; he had seen a side of Lyndon Johnson he had not seen previously, and an element of fear, of intimidation, had been added to their relationship, as is revealed by the rest of Humphrey's explanation for wanting to dispense with a formal vote: "Number Two, I knew that Johnson would keep book. I mean, when that roll call came he'd watch to see who each one of them was." Whatever the explanation for Humphrey's motion, however, it gave Johnson not merely unity but unanimity.

After the caucus, Johnson summoned Humphrey to Room 231, and when Humphrey came—alone—Johnson asked him: "Now, what do you liberals really want?" Humphrey was to recall that "the dialogue was brief and to the point. 'The first thing we want is some representation on the Policy Committee.'

"All right, you'll have it. Who do you want?"

"Well, I think it ought to be Jim Murray."

"I don't think he's the right man, because he's older and he won't be effective, but if that's who you want, that'll be done. What else do you want?"

"I listed our other requests (formerly demands)" for liberal representation on a number of committees, Humphrey was to recall, and Johnson agreed to them. And then Johnson said, "Since you had enough sense not to drive it to a vote down there and made it unanimous, I am perfectly willing to deal with you." But, the new Leader said, "I don't want you bringing in a lot of these other fellows. . . . When you've got something that your people want, *you* come see me. I'll talk to you. I don't want to talk to those other fellows." He said, "Now you go back and tell your liberal friends that you're the one to talk to me and that if they'll talk through you as their leader we can get some things done."

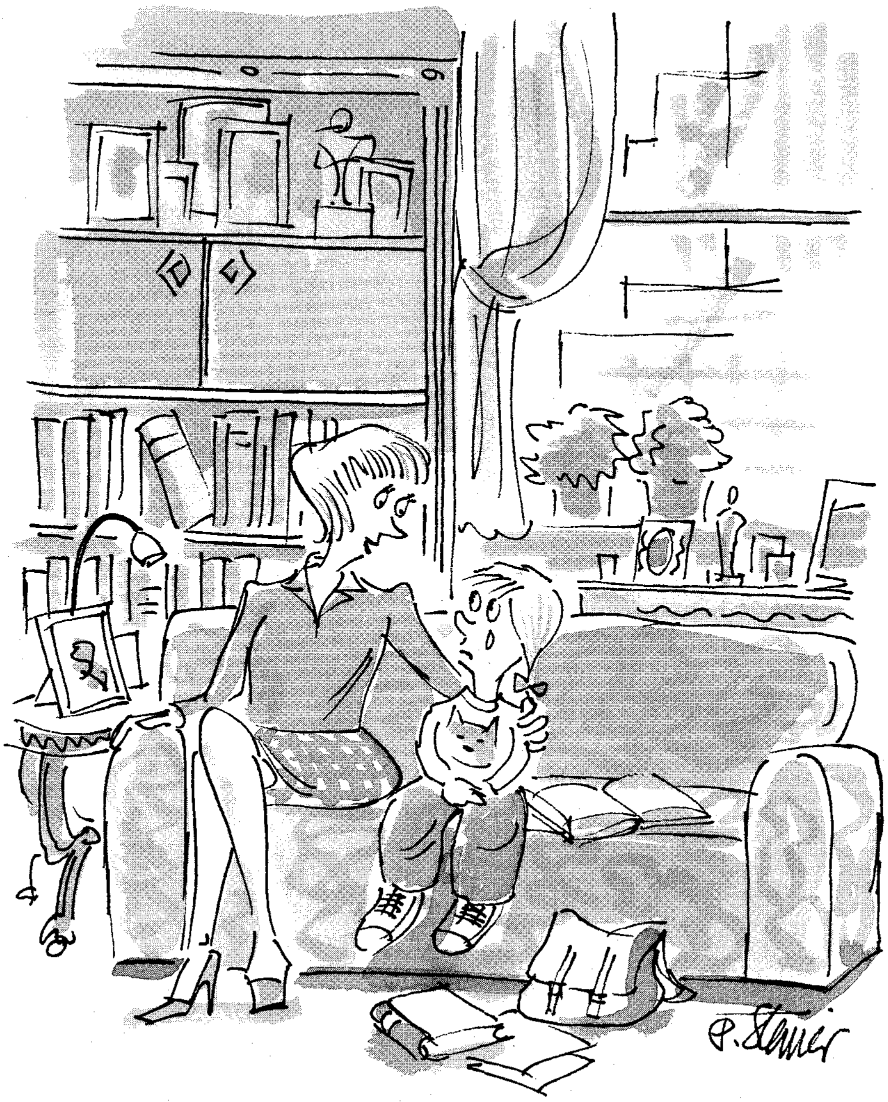
What Johnson was offering Humphrey now was power—the first power Humphrey had had in the Senate. Those "other fellows" would be told that if they wanted something from their party's Leader (and of course they would all, at one time or another, want something from the Leader), their best course would be to ask Humphrey to approach him on their behalf.

Humphrey understood the offer, and its significance for him: "I would be the bridge from Johnson to my liberal colleagues." He would hold the power only at Johnson's pleasure. "I had become his conduit and their spokesman not by their election, but by his appointment." As long as he and Johnson got along—but only as long as he and Johnson got along—he would keep that power.

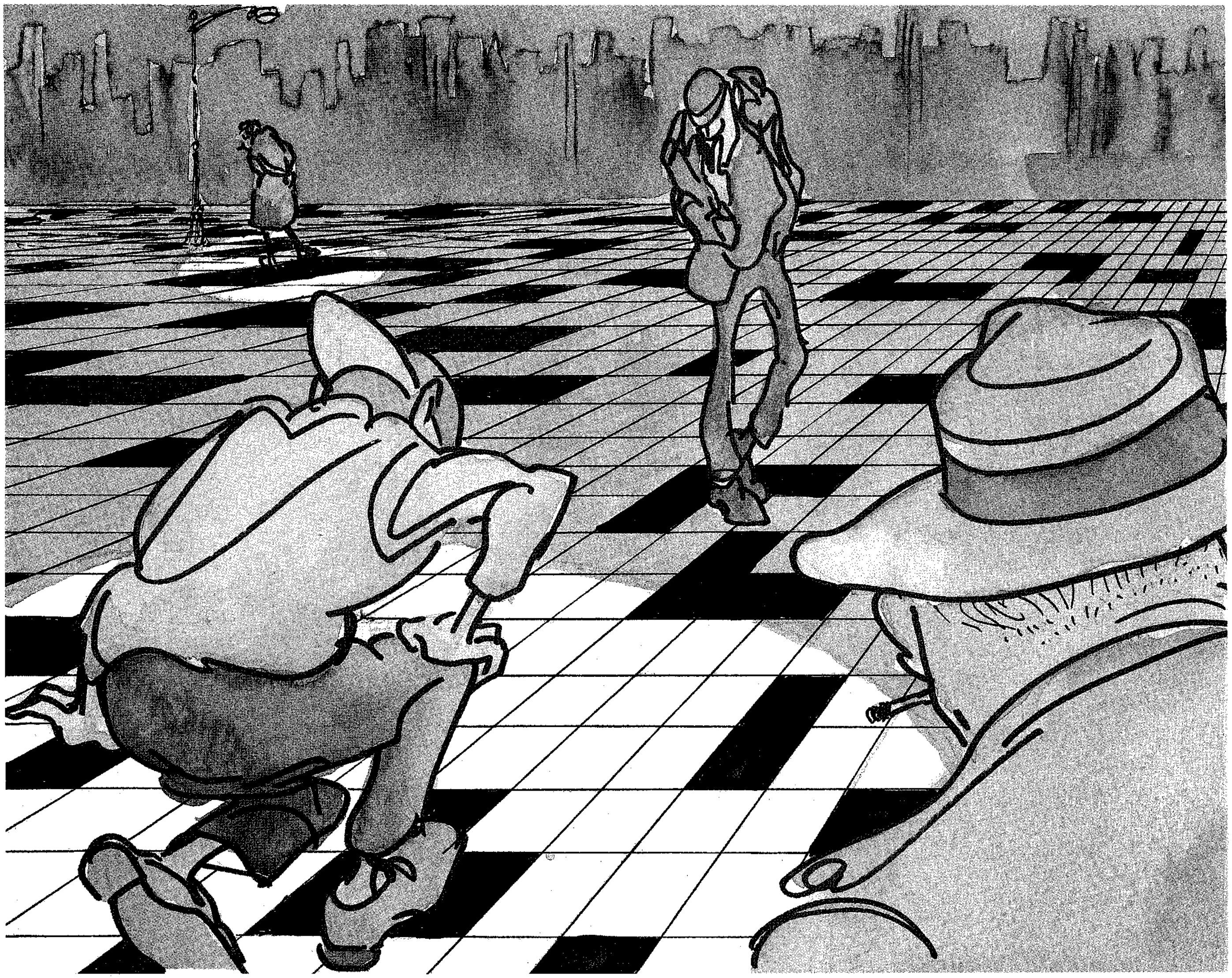
And he accepted the offer. He was to say in his autobiography that he accepted it in the interests of getting things done. "I knew clearly by then that I had no chance of influencing legislation in any major way without the help of the . . . Leader. With his influence, I might get the necessary votes for legislation I was interested in." As time would make clear, however, he had accepted it also in his own interest. For whatever reason, the offer was accepted, and, in accepting it, Humphrey was in effect pledging his allegiance to Lyndon Johnson.

The significance of this pledge for Johnson's prospects as Leader can hardly be exaggerated. He had needed to unify his party, which meant bringing the liberals to his side. Now he had succeeded in bringing the liberals' leader to his side, in binding him there quite firmly.

The significance—and cost—of that pledge for Hubert Humphrey would become apparent in years to come. ♦



"It's all right, sweetie. In the information age, everybody feels stupid."



JULES FEIFFER

OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

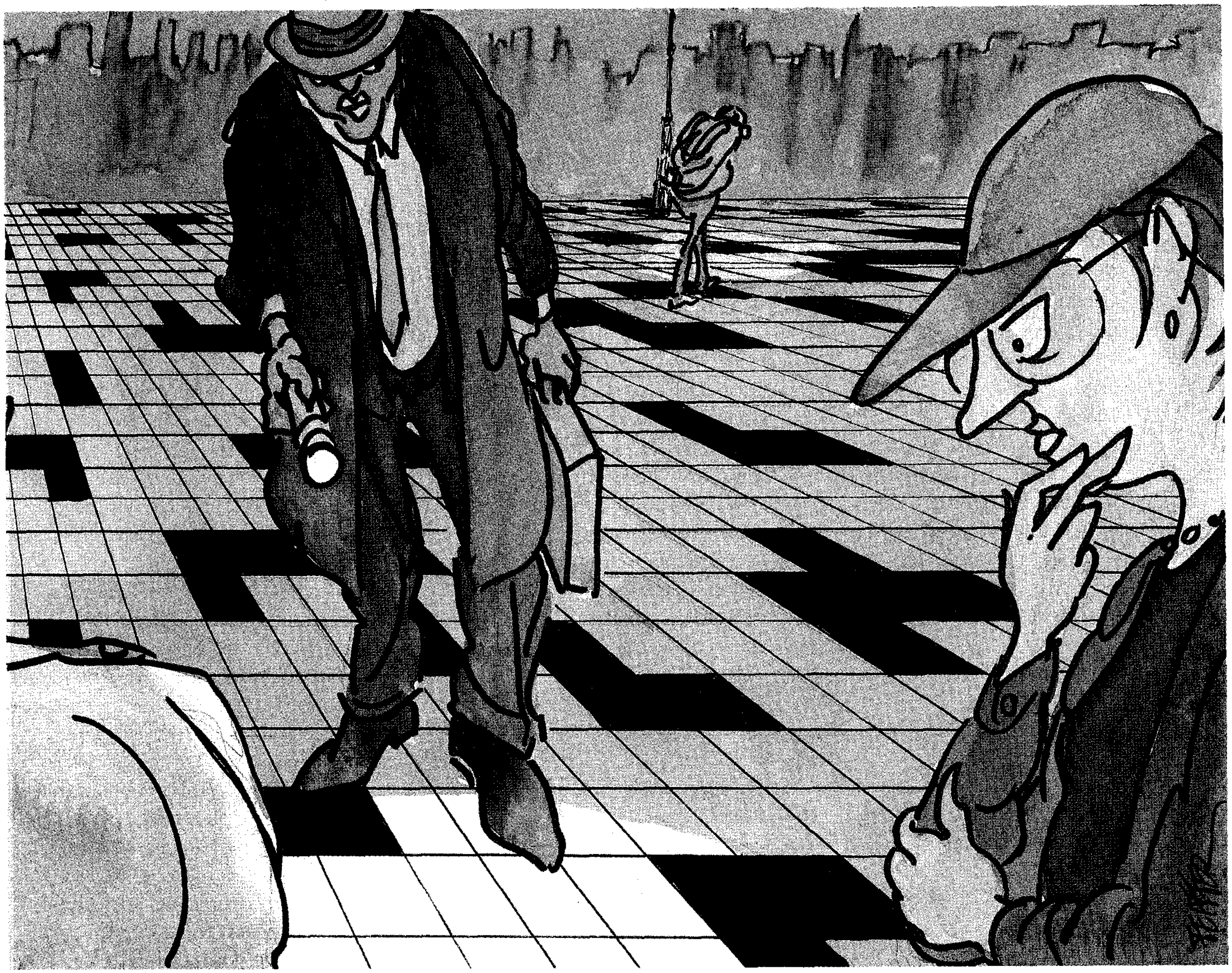
THE RIDDLER

Meet the Marquis de Sade of the puzzle world.

BY BURKHARD BILGER

When Henry Hook was fourteen years old, living in East Rutherford, New Jersey, his grandmother gave him a crossword jigsaw puzzle for Christmas. Designed by Eugene T. Maleska, who became a legendary editor of the *Times* crossword, the puzzle had three parts. First, you had to solve the crossword puzzle on paper; then you had to fit the jigsaw pieces together in order to verify your answers. When you were done, if you looked carefully you could find a secret message zigzagging through the answers: "YOU HAVE JUST FINISHED THE WORLD'S MOST REMARKABLE CROSSWORD." Hook was less than impressed. Within a matter of days, he sent a rebuttal puzzle to Maleska. It contained a hidden message of its own: "WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOUR PUZZLE IS MORE REMARKABLE THAN MINE?"

In the thirty-two years since then, Hook has come to be known as the Marquis de Sade of the puzzle world: a brilliant and oddly beloved misanthrope, administering exquisite torture through dozens of puzzle books and syndicated crosswords. But he's not used to being clueless himself. Standing at the corner of Forty-third Street and Ninth Avenue one Saturday night, glaring out from beneath a Brooklyn baseball cap, he looks both fearsomely focussed and a little disoriented. He's been brought here, along with a team of other puzzle experts, by a blank scroll of paper—the first clue in an elaborate treasure hunt known as Midnight Madness. From Fortieth Street to Sixtieth Street and from the East River to the Hudson, fifteen teams are scrambling across Manhattan in search of clues, each of which points to another location. Every fifteen minutes, teams can call in to headquarters and ask for a hint; the



first team to reach the last location wins.

Half an hour ago, one of Hook's seven teammates pulled out a tape measure and found that the blank scroll was exactly forty-three by nine inches. That brought them to this intersection, where they've been searching ever since. Across the street, a writer for "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" and a crossword virtuoso named Ellen Ripstein are scrutinizing graffiti in a phone booth. Catercornered to them, the editor of the *Wall Street Journal* crossword is standing beside a professional palindromist who is riffling through a bin of adult-education pamphlets. But by now they're not alone. All around them, spindly cryptologists from fourteen other teams are scanning signs and peering sharply at Chinese menus. Hook's teammates already look winded—they're accustomed to more sedentary puzzle-solving—but their opponents are dismayingly sprightly. They are also better prepared: one team has come with nearly twenty members, many of them dressed in black, who are being deployed like ninjas around the intersection.

Hunts like this are the X-Games of cryptology: half wordplay and half extreme sport. The clues are as much as a mile apart, and the organizers—three shadowy figures known to us only by their first names—seem more interested in absurdist humor and elaborate effects than in pure deductive logic. "I hope you know I'm missing my karaoke night for this," Hook mutters, lumbering past. Given his reclusive ways, it's a wonder he agreed to join at all, and it's clear that he expects to regret it. The T-shirt he's wearing shows a man with thick spectacles irately crumpling an I.Q. test. "Why am I doing this?" the man is saying. "Why am I allowing myself to be humiliated by these moronic puzzles?!"

Before long, Hook's team is so desperate for a clue that the writer for "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" begins quizzing a local panhandler and calling in random guesses to headquarters. Finally, during one call, someone tosses him a lifeline: "Fearless, brave, bold, courageous, valiant, heroic, daring, resolute, audacious, plucky." The puzzlers glance up at one another with twisted grins: at long last, some words. Then they charge off, as one, for the Hudson.

I first met Hook at the 2001 American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, in Stamford, Connecticut, the largest gathering of puzzlers in the world. (This year is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the event, which will be held from March 15th through the 17th.) More than fifty million Americans solve a crossword at least occasionally, making this by some accounts the most popular indoor pastime in the country. Of these, an élite three hundred and fifty or so come to Stamford every year. In the lobby of the local Marriott, you can see them slumped in armchairs and hunched over coffee tables, playing newly invented board games and odd variations on charades. In the hallways, venders peddle puzzle books, crossword art, and a custom-made crossword Barbie, complete with miniature clue sheets, grids, and pencils. When one puzzler saw me wandering around a little befuddled, he swept his arm across the room as if he were a ringmaster: "Welcome to Weirdoland!"

Joshua Kosman, a classical-music critic for the San Francisco *Chronicle*, is a typical attendee. "The past fifteen years, for me, has been a process of sinking into, codifying, and coming to terms with the fact that this is what I do. That I'm a puzzle guy," he told me. Then he cut to the chase: "Did you know that Britney Spears has signed a big endorsement deal with Pepsi? That's right, it's true, and we are all very happy about it. You see, 'Pepsi-Cola' is an anagram of 'Episcopal' and 'Britney Spears' is an anagram of 'Presbyterians.'" He paused to let this sink in, but my reaction wasn't quite what he had hoped for. "Yeah, I know," he said. "'Episcopal' is singular, and 'Presbyterians' is plural. But we take what we can get."

For nearly a hundred and twenty years, people blessed with such minds have found one another through the National Puzzlers' League, which publishes a monthly newsletter called *The Enigma*. The three hundred and fifty-odd members of the league go by code names that are themselves often miniature puzzles: Kosman's is Trazom (Mozart backward); a member named Ilene goes simply by *I*, because the italics make the "I" lean. Over time, the league's ranks have fissured into the usual sects and denominations: rhyming riddlers, acrostic enigmatologists, and the like. But crosswords are the common denominator, and in Stamford the participants are sorted into a single, ruthless hierarchy.

TODAY'S SERMON

"So I'll have to believe it to see it?"

It wasn't always so. Not long after crosswords were invented, by an editor at the New York *Sunday World*, in 1913, *The Enigma* called for an "anti-toxin to prevent people from taking this dread disease." The new puzzles were an "inane mental exercise"—glorified quiz sheets for woolly-headed dictionary lovers. But, with time, crosswords grew more intricate and demanding, and puzzlers now reserve their contempt for Scrabble fanatics. Competitive Scrabble is all about memorizing lists of two-, three-, and four-letter words, puzzlers say. But rote memorization won't help you in Stamford. There, everyone sits at cafeteria-style tables in the ballroom, filling in grids while a giant clock ticks away onstage. Invariably, the same hands dart up first, followed, at predictable intervals, by batches of also-rans and then the rest of the rumbling herd. "I've done over nine hundred crosswords in the past three months to get ready for this," a kindly, silver-haired puzzler from Pennsylvania named Carolyn Bartlebaugh told me. "I've just saturated my brain with two-toed sloths and so forth." But she didn't expect to gain much ground. "If I can crack the top hundred, I'll be happy," she said.

To shave seconds off their response times, some puzzlers learn to read clues and write answers simultaneously, to scrawl their "e"s with a single stroke, and to start with the easy, fill-in-the-blank questions. But real success depends on qualities that aren't so readily learned: instant recall, omnivorous interests, a genius for pattern recognition, and a certain, double-jointed wit. During the past fourteen years, the same four players—Trip Payne, Douglas Hoylman, Ellen Ripstein, and Jon Delfin—have claimed thirty-six of the tournament's forty-two spots for finalists. This year, as usual, all four were competing.

Sitting in the ballroom on the first morning of the tournament, I watched Payne, a gangly two-time champion from Georgia, limber up with the Saturday *Times* crossword. The *Times* edits its puzzles to get harder as the week progresses: an average solver will do the Monday puzzle in an hour or so, the Wednesday in two hours, and fling the Saturday puzzle across the room in a fit of impotent fury. But Payne didn't look worried. Flipping to the puzzle, he punched a stopwatch, cast his large, liquid eyes over the clues, and began to scribble. And never stopped. "Halberdier's opponent"? "Lancer," of course. "Resistance figure"? What else but "ohmage"? When the last square had been filled, Payne shouted "Done!" and slapped down his pencil. The stopwatch read 7:27.

A few tables away, Ellen Ripstein was carefully arranging her papers and pencils on the table. At forty-eight, she still looked like a schoolgirl, with her round, guileless face, toothy smile, and Orphan Annie dress. She made her living as a researcher for a game show (she wasn't allowed to say which one), and had spent the past few weeks solving ten to fifteen puzzles a day under tournament conditions. At one point, she completed a Saturday *Times* puzzle in 4:46, yet she knew that speed wasn't enough. In 1988, she finished first in the finals, only to find that she had made one error: she'd written "senseleseness" instead of "senselessness." Since then, she had extended her streak of top-five finishes to eighteen years—an astonishing run—without once winning. She was known as the Susan Lucci of crosswords.

Twelfth Avenue and Forty-sixth Street, Pier 86, 9:15 P.M.

The U.S.S. Intrepid hasn't seen action since Vietnam, but, rising from the Hudson in great gray battlements, its searchlights probing the underbellies of clouds, it still looks plenty fearless, brave, bold, courageous, valiant, heroic, daring, resolute, audacious, and plucky. Along the pier, players from various teams aim their flashlight beams across the water's oily surface, picking out pop bottles, decayed life preservers, scraps of billboard, and a broken doll stranded on the pilings. It's tempting to climb down for a closer look—there could be a recording in the doll's head—but just then the palindromist comes running up. "I found this hidden beside that tank, over in front of the ship," he says, catching his breath. He's holding a large manila envelope.

Inside is a gray postcard with a picture of Joe DiMaggio. "Notice anything odd about it?" the palindromist says, grinning. The puzzlers pass the postcard around, flip it over, and squint at the photograph. Nothing. Then they feel it: the faintest buzzing at their fingertips. Sandwiched somewhere inside the cardboard is a tiny speaker, and it's playing the next clue. When they lift the card to their ears, the vibration swells into a sound, a rhythm, and then a syncopated tune: "Her name was Lola, she was a showgirl . . ."

The reigning king of puzzledom in Stamford—the seemingly immovable object through which Ripstein had to pass—was Douglas Hoylman, a retired insurance actuary, also known as the Ice Man. Hoylman is a pale, blinking hulk of a man, so shy and deliberate as to seem almost slow-witted. Yet he has a Ph.D. in mathematics (his dissertation solved an old conundrum concerning the optimal packing of tetrahedrons) and a memory that stretches, flawlessly, from Harry Truman to "The Truman Show." By the time I met him, he had won the tournament six times—a record—including three out of the previous five years. I was startled to find, therefore, that the puzzle hierarchy didn't end with him. "I've timed myself against Stan Newman, and he's much faster than I am," Hoylman said, referring to a former champion who holds the official record for solving the Monday *Times* crossword—2:14. "And if David Rosen were still in the tournament he'd probably still be winning."

The true élite, it turned out, tend to bow out of competition. They serve as officials, or construct crosswords for the tournament, and leave the prizes to others. I found them later that morning, sprawled in a conference room on the second floor, eating Irish soda bread and washing it down with a growler of home-brewed Crossword beer. Rosen, tall and bald, with lively eyes behind brown horn-rimmed glasses, was sitting beside Maura B. Jacobson, the elfin editor of the *New York* magazine crossword. As referees brought in completed puzzles, Rosen and the other twenty or so officials scored the answers, pausing only to ridicule the occasional hapless entry.

"Who the hell writes 'skua' with a 'q'?"

"Eriq LaSalle!"

"Wasn't he just on the cover of *GQ*?"

"You mean *GK*."

Halfway through a particularly inept puzzle, Rosen's red pen suddenly stopped moving. "For the 'God of sex,' this one answered 'Iris,' " he said, smiling wistfully. "Who knows? Maybe she is."

Rosen, who designs voice-response software for a living, is the subject of what is perhaps the most famous legend in the puzzle world. Several years ago, he beat an accomplished crossword constructor named Peter Gordon in an informal race, even though Gordon was filling out his own puzzle. The next year, they tried it again, but this time Gordon went over the puzzle the night before. He still lost.

In his heyday, Rosen usually beat Stan Newman, the other former phenomenon, so it seemed safe to say that he was the fastest solver around. But, as we were talking, bursts of laughter kept interrupting us from another table. Glancing over, I recognized a brassy brunette named Nancy Schuster, who won the first Stamford tournament, in 1978. Most of the jokes, though, seemed to be coming from the judge beside her. He was dressed like a banker from the waist down—black slacks, navy-blue socks, polished loafers—and like a Beastie Boy from the waist up. A baseball cap was jammed over his fringe of gray curls, and a very large logo covered his ample upper body: "DID YOU EVER STOP TO THINK AND FORGET TO START AGAIN?" With his bulbous features and his weed-whacker voice, he reminded me a little of W. C. Fields and a little of the singing frog from the old Warner Bros. cartoon: hogging the spotlight even as he hid from it.

Rosen swivelled around to follow the commotion, then turned back to our table. When I asked him who the guy in the T-shirt was, he grinned. "That's the man you're looking for," he said. "He's in a class by himself."

The man, of course, was Henry Hook.

Fifty-seventh Street, between Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues, 10:30 P.M.

Under the neon lights of the Copacabana, among the Kahlúa-skinned women in salsa dresses, a man with fifteen white balloons is talking to the writer for "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." The writer nods, takes one of the balloons, and stomps on it. A translucent scroll falls to the pavement. Unfurled, it shows a small clock with hands pointing to seven-forty-two, and a keyboard without letters. A series of numbers, from one to twenty-one, are scattered across the keys.

"Here, let me do this," Ripstein says. "I type over a hundred words a minute." While the others hold the scroll against a brick wall, she positions her fingers on the imaginary keys. She looks to see which letters the numbers correspond to, then calls them out in sequence. But she keeps getting flustered and losing her place. Hook finally steps in. "I don't see why you're bothering with that," he says. "I've got the letters memorized: Q W E R T Y U I O P A S D F G H . . ." Less than a minute later, they have the clue: cat.nyu.edu/rebecca/m. Then they hop into a cab and send the driver to Seventh Avenue and Forty-second Street, in search of a computer.

The urge to play with words tends to possess puzzlers early. Ripstein filled out her first children's crossword by the age of six and soon graduated to her parents' grids. Hook started even younger, linking and anagramming letter blocks on his bedroom floor at the age of four. From the start, he was a puzzle polymath, able to solve and construct both word and number puzzles with blinding speed. "It's like he has ten pencils for fingers," Nancy Schuster told me. "If he were a rocket scientist, we would probably be on Mars by now."

Not long after Hook sent Eugene Maleska his rebuttal puzzle, Maleska wrote him a letter. "He thought I was in the business," Hook recalls. "But I was just in high school." The two struck up a correspondence, and Maleska eventually invited Hook to his house for some pointers. It's hard to imagine a meeting of less compatible minds. Maleska had taught Latin and English and worked as a school superintendent, and he brought the same knuckle-rapping rigor to editing puzzles. His grids were scrubbed free of brand names and vulgar trivia. They were larded with famous operatic sopranos, laced tight with obscure Central Asian rivers, and stuffed with crosswordese (words like "esne"—an Anglo-Saxon slave—which seem to survive only in crosswords). Although Maleska spent his life creating games, he was an educator first and an entertainer second.

Hook was neither. "I got into this business to torment people," he says. "On that line on the tax form where they ask for your occupation, I'd like to put 'Grand Inquisitor.'" Latin and Greek were of limited interest to him, but he loved the indeterminacy of language—the way "Rapunzel" could be defined as "She was stuck up"—and the smudgy double meanings lurking in syntax. He was a glutton for game shows, a student of slang and shifting idioms, and a dedicated follower of pop celebrities. If Maleska was a classicist, Hook was a puzzle postmodernist.

Still, at first Hook could hardly afford to rebel. His father died when he was seventeen, leaving him with his mother to support, and though he earned a degree in mathematics, he never seriously considered using it. For years, he spent his nights constructing puzzles at fifty dollars each and his days unloading trucks at the back of a drugstore. ("I held a variety of jobs," he once wrote, "all of which have served as excellent training for my current position, which is usually at a forty-five-degree angle, facing southwest.") Finally, in 1980, at the age of twenty-four, Hook joined the staff of the magazine *Games*—and proceeded to yank crosswords out of the schoolroom at last.

Games was the country's first self-respecting puzzle publication: a thick glossy in a genre long dominated by fly-by-night newsletters. Soon after its founding, in 1977, its circulation rose to two hundred thousand and a clutch of brilliant constructors left their monastic cells to join it. Their strategy was simple but revolutionary: instead of offering straightforward clues to obscure words, they would offer clever clues to common words. (When Hook stooped to using "esne," he clued it as "A slave to crosswords.") Instead of rigidly quoting the dictionary, they would stretch the

THE LAST EVENING

Then we raised the top portion of the bed,
and her head was like a trillium, growing
up, out of the ground, in the woods,
eyes closed, mouth open,
and we put the Battle arias on, and when I
heard the first note, that was it, for me,
I excused myself from the death-room guests,
and went to my mother, and cleared a place
on the mattress, beside her arm, lifting
the tubes, oxygen, dextrose, morphine,
dipping in under them, and letting them
rest on my hair, as if burying myself
under a topsoil of roots, I pulled
the sheet up, over my head,
and touched my forehead and nose and mouth
to her arm, and then, against the warm
solace of her skin, I sobbed full out,
unguarded, as I have not done near her;
and I could feel some barrier between us dissolving,
I could feel myself dissolving it,
moving ever closer to her through it, till I was
all there, I went to my mom
for comfort. And in her coma nothing
drew her away from giving me the basal
kindness of her presence, I took a long turn

as a child on earth. When the doctor came in,
he looked at her and said, "I'd say
hours, not days." When he left, I ate
a pear with her, talking us through it,
and walnuts—and a crow, a whole bouquet
of crows came apart, outside the window.
I looked for the moon and said, I'll be right
back, and ran down the hospital hall,
and there, outside an eastern window,
was the waxing gibbous, like a swimmer's head
turned to the side half out of the water, mouth
pulled to the side and back, to take breath,
I could see my young mother, slim
and strong in her navy one-piece, and see,
in memory's dark-blue corridor,
the beauty of her crawl, the hard, graceful
overhand motion, as someone who says
This way, to the others behind. And I went back,
and sat with her, alone, an hour,
in the quiet, and I felt, almost, not
afraid of losing her, I was so
content to have her beside me, unspeaking,
unseeing, alive.

—*Sharon Olds*

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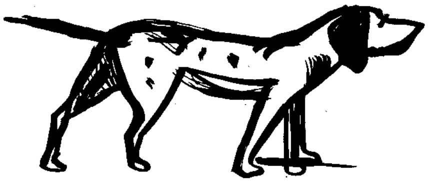
boundaries of language. In a puzzle called "Element 18," for instance, Hook removed the letter "R" from all the answers—element eighteen in the periodic table being argon.

Maleska, by then, was ensconced in his mountain fastness at the *Times*, spraying buckshot at the growing horde of mutinous phrases below. He rejected one constructor's puzzle because it contained "car seat," and another because it contained "air play"; in both cases he assumed that the phrase was made up. "I still have some of his letters around," one constructor told me. "They were usually along the lines of 'Get out of the business. Never make a puzzle again.' "

There was a point during those years when it seemed as if Hook might learn to love his fractious place in the puzzle world. The *Games* constructors eventually carried the day, freeing up the puzzle vocabulary, if only a little ("bra" might now be clued as "Shape shifter," but "Two cupfuls of milk" would still be rejected). Then, in 1984, at a party for puzzlers, Hook met a woman named Stephanie Abrams and instantly, improbably, fell in love. "I was astonished that he could find someone," Schuster told me. "But Stephanie was a very clever puzzler, and she brought out a whole side of him that was hidden." Within a year, Hook moved to Massachusetts to join her, and the two were married. She began to construct crosswords and word-search puzzles, with the help of her live-in editor, and helped put together a puzzlers' convention. But Abrams had cystic fibrosis and her condition worsened month by month. Only four years after they met, she died. "I stayed there another year," Hook says, "and then I had to get away."

He lives and works in Brooklyn now, not far from Prospect Park, in a small wooden house so barricaded to guests that he barely lets the cable man in. "I'm the guy that inspired the phrase 'Doesn't play well with others,' " he says. On most days, he wakes up by seven, does a word search to get his eyes focussed, and then spends the day shuttling between his crossword grids, his reference books, and the television. More and more crossword constructors are relying on computer programs and data bases of common clues. Hook uses only a pencil ("A computer looks really stupid tucked behind your ear"), yet he has been known to come up with twenty-four crosswords and write more than fifteen hundred clues in three days. In addition to constructing a crossword for the Sunday Boston *Globe* every other week, he writes two puzzle books a year for Random House and hundreds of puzzles that are syndicated for smaller publications.



Then again, there is very little to distract him. Once a week, Hook used to get dressed up, walk to a karaoke bar several blocks away, and belt out a few Sinatra or Elvis tunes. But, he says, he got bored with the same old crowd, and he gave up his membership in the National Puzzlers' League long ago—"logophilia in the extreme." He says he dreams of being a former crossword constructor, but it's not clear what else he would do. A while back, Schuster went to visit him in Brooklyn. "When someone has so many virtues, you forgive him his eccentricities," she says. They met for lunch, went to the park, and played Scrabble. And then Schuster went home.

Fifty-third Street, between Fifth and Madison Avenues, 12:01 A.M.

A light rain is falling on the East Side, glazing its abandoned streets in silver. Hook's team wanders through, trading puns and trying to think of rhymes for "borscht." An hour ago, the clue from the Copacabana led to an Internet café in Times Square, where an intricate online scavenger hunt eventually coughed up this address: "53RD NAHE FÜNF." Now one of Hook's teammates ducks into the portico of the Rolex Building and looks around expectantly. "Nahe Fünf, nahe Fünf," he says. "The hiding place has to be Germanic."

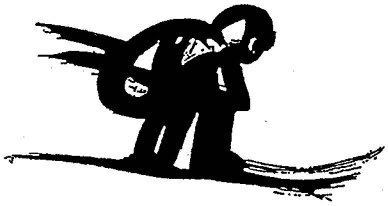
But the portico is empty. As everyone scatters to search the rest of the block, two members of the black team wander past, already headed for the next clue. It takes Hook's team another ten minutes to find what they're looking for: a large Ziploc bag hidden behind a slab of the Berlin Wall. Inside the bag is a page of rubbings taken from a sequence of small bronze reliefs of New York landmarks; one of the landmarks is conspicuously missing. "I've seen those near Grand Central," the *Wall Street Journal*'s crossword editor says. Then he beckons the others back into the rain.

On the last day of the Stamford tournament, it was breezy and the sky was breathtakingly blue, though few of the puzzlers noticed. After a long Saturday of competition, they had stayed up until 4 or 5 A.M. playing games. I found them late in the morning, clustered around a wall beside the check-in desk, craning their necks to see the final standings. Carolyn Bartlebaugh, the puzzler from Pennsylvania, was thrilled; after six puzzles, she was ranked at exactly a hundred. But the top of the hierarchy had been shockingly rearranged. Trip Payne, after lopping to his usual lead, had somehow blanked on celebrity bullfighters and written "Masolete" instead of "Manolete," and Douglas Hoylman, the Ice Man, had been just a little too methodical: he was in fourth place, six minutes short of qualifying for the final. The only familiar face in the finals was the most familiar one of all: Ellen Ripstein had extended her streak to nineteen years, matching Susan Lucci's nineteen nominations before she won an Emmy.

In the afternoon, three giant crossword grids were set on easels at the front of the ballroom, and the finalists took their places holding erasable markers. To the left was Al Sanders, a perennial also-ran from Colorado. (On the first day, I'd heard someone mutter, in mock indignation, "Why is it I get the impression that no one is taking Al Sanders seriously?" Everyone had burst out laughing, yet here was Sanders.) Beside him was Patrick Jordan, a solver from Oklahoma who had worn a bright-green stovepipe hat throughout the early rounds. Ripstein was on the far right, looking too short to reach the top row of the puzzle and surrounded by cameramen from ABC and CBS. To drown out any hints or distractions, the finalists were wearing headsets that played crowd noise recorded at the United Nations.

Back in the nineteen-twenties, such hoopla might not have seemed so anomalous. The first book of crosswords, published in 1924 by Dick Simon and Max Schuster, sparked a nationwide craze and launched the publishing firm of Simon & Schuster. But when I spoke to Will Shortz, the current *Times* crossword editor, he was anything but nostalgic. Shortz is the only person in the world who has a degree in enigmatology (he designed his own course of study at Indiana University), so he knows crossword history. "We are living in the golden age of puzzles," he said. Constructors now achieve the most dazzling architectural feats routinely, laying down triple rows of fifteen-letter answers twice or even three times in a single puzzle, and weaving clever themes through their grids like morning glories. In the process, they're winning over a new generation of solvers. Earlier that week, Shortz had told the *Wall Street Journal* that the crowd would "blow the roof off the hotel" if Ripstein won. In reply, the Marriott management had greeted Ripstein with a fruit basket and a welcome letter. "Best of luck this weekend," it said. "We will have the roofers stand by."

The only person who seemed not to be primed for cruciverbalist rapture was Hook: as usual, he had slipped off before the final round. Twenty years earlier, at an élite crossword tournament in Ridgewood, New Jersey, he was given four formidable puzzles to solve, a time limit of close to three hours, and a chance at a grand-prize trip to England. He finished in half an hour ("I hate to tell you this," the m.c. announced, "but you're all competing for second place"), then spent the rest of the time trading acrostic notes with Nancy Schuster. He never went to England and never entered another tournament. "I'm not a traveller," he told me, and speed-solving felt too much like stenography.



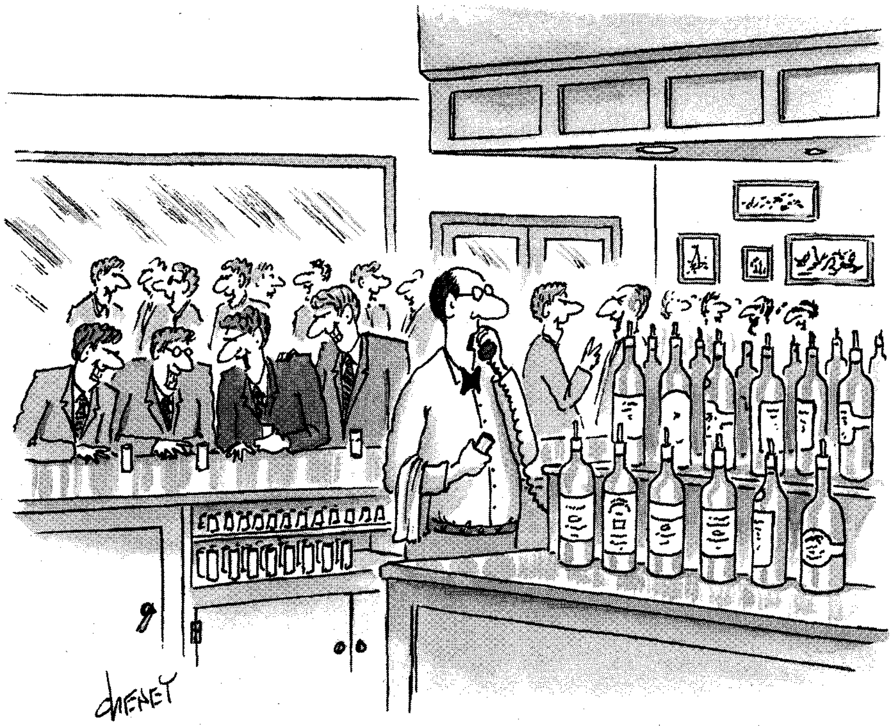
In Stamford, Ripstein got off to an early lead, and managed to dash off "aristas" ("Some beards") and "bhang" ("Hallucinogenic drink made from Indian hemp"). But her strategy was unorthodox. Instead of starting at the upper left corner and working her way around the puzzle, she jumped immediately to the right side. That left her stranded without 1 across ("What sots don't do?"), a ten-letter answer on which much depended. Jordan took the standard path, built on previously placed letters, and soon surged ahead. He filled in "at bats" ("Denominator in some stats") and "coigns" ("Wedge-shaped pieces of wood"), and hesitated only briefly before writing "bard" ("Avon calling?"). When he bent down to fill in the final square, to a scattering of applause, all the air seemed to go out of the room. Even without the Ice Man around, Ripstein couldn't win.

Or could she? A murmur of protest rippled across the ballroom. At the lower right corner of the puzzle, in response to "Bonaventure, e.g.," Jordan had written "past" instead of "mast." Like Ripstein in 1988, he had made a single, senseless error.

Afterward, when Ripstein had finally figured out what sots don't do ("pass the bar") and Al Sanders had limped in for a distant third, the crowd erupted almost as explosively as had been predicted. The TV cameramen raced down the aisles for startling closeups of unusual words (it's hard to make a puzzle seem dramatic), and Ripstein took off her headphones so that she could, at last, hear her acclaim. "Is that your lucky dress?" a reporter shouted. "How did you prepare?" Ripstein smiled, her face incandescent above the cloud of reporters and klieg lights. Then she calmly gave the answers that she'd been preparing for nineteen years.

Corner of Mercer Street and Waverly Place, 2 A.M.

The victory party has already begun. Along the bar and in the booths of a



"Could you be more specific, Ma'am? This place is crawling with sneaky little bastards."

subterranean college dive, members of the black team are downing beers and smiling smugly at more recent arrivals. When the jukebox plays ABBA's "Dancing Queen," they leap from their seats with a whoop and shout for more volume, then flail around like pieces of squid-ink pasta.

One by one, Hook's teammates shuffle in, looking more disoriented than ever. For a short while, at the Internet café, they seemed to be in the lead. But a stalled subway car cost them half an hour, and the clues that followed were so simple that they couldn't catch up. The missing landmark from the page of rubbings was Lever House, a modernist skyscraper at Fifty-third Street and Park Avenue. There, a man in a white lab coat gave them one plastic vial with five units of water and another vial with one unit—a clear reference to Fifty-first Street, along the river. The hunt came to an end on a footbridge above the F.D.R. Drive, where a series of digits, illuminated by glow sticks, spelled out a cell-phone number. When they made the call, they were given this address, and were told they had finished in second place.

"I hope the balloon guy is here," Hook says. "I'd really like to see him again." But the costumes have all been put away, and with them the air of mystery that seemed, for a time, to suffuse the city. Hook shifts and fidgets, looking suddenly a little old to be wearing a puzzle T-shirt. He sips his Coke a bit too fast and edges toward the exit, as the dancers pogo around him. Then he notices something. Sitting on a stool near the door, keeping a mildly menacing eye on the crowd, is a bald, muscle-bound bouncer. In his lap is a copy of the *Times* Sunday crossword, half solved.

For every Midnight Madness player or crossword competitor, there will always be a hundred thousand others like this, scribbling on subways, in private studies, and in the back booths of anonymous diners, nursing their obsessions in secret. "No one ever talks about them, but we know they're out there," an editor in Stamford told me. "Every time a newspaper changes its puzzle format, the switchboard lights up." When the other puzzlers see what Hook sees, they grin and lean over to find out who constructed the puzzle. The jukebox switches to Tom Jones belting out "It's Not Unusual," and soon the enormous bouncer is being introduced to the diminutive national crossword champion. "I usually do the Monday and Tuesday," he tells her bashfully, covering his answers with his hand. "But Wednesday and Thursday are a little too hard." Ripstein nods and smiles, as if she knows exactly what he means.

Crosswords aren't so different from life, one constructor told me. You start out floundering in a void, plagued by questions. And then, little by little, you begin to find answers. You build gradually on your knowledge, or make mistakes and double back, and pretty soon you find that everything is connected to everything else. But if crosswords can be addictive—if some people love them nearly to the point of folly—it may be because real life hardly enters into them. Here every problem has a solution, and pain, disease, violence, and despair never make it to the grid. "When you solve a crossword, you don't want death or Nazis thrown in your face," Will Shortz says. "If there is a seventy-year-old woman who is filling out the grid and she's got '__uck,' I can't imagine making her add an 'F.' "

Hook can. His career has been one long effort to subvert our safe assumptions about puzzles, to make them as unsettling and unpredictable as art. On the cab ride back to Brooklyn, he reminds me, for the third time, never to let him join another treasure hunt. But then he seems to have second thoughts. "I've been thinking that you could make the whole thing a lot nastier," he says, as he's getting out. "Wherever there is a clue, there could be a sign nearby. Every sign would have a letter missing, so for the last clue you'd have to take those missing letters. . . . " And with that he wanders off into the Brooklyn night, alone once again. The avenue is deserted, and the traffic lights and neon signs flash for no one. But, to Hook, every glowing word has a life of its own. As he walks past, the letters seem to break ranks and crowd together above his head; they shift and shuffle, leap and double, pair up and trade partners like a chorus line at the Copacabana. Then they quietly assume their places again, and await the next puzzler. ♦

FICTION

FASCINATION

BY WILLIAM BOYD

It is six in the morning and I sit in my kitchen looking out at the garden, watching the sun slant obliquely past the old lime tree and across my lawn to reveal the dense silver mesh of spiders' webs linking the grass stems. For a few seconds, as the earth turns and the sun continues to rise, my tufty rectangle of suburban lawn flashes in my fascinated eyes like a burnished shield—before becoming dull green grass again, my quotidian epiphany gone forever. And I think, Where and when had I seen that before? Which of the myriad interlocking memories woven through my life had fired there? Then my moment of transcendence becomes mundane: I say to myself, I really must have my mower repaired, soon. Felicia will want the lawn cut and it is my constant ambition to preëmpt her reproaches and complaints.

"And there among the grass fell down / By his own scythe, the Mower mown." "Damon the Mower," by Andrew Marvell. I must stop thinking about poetry.

I'm the first of the household awake and dressed. I can hear my wife upstairs, moving about in the bathroom. Our baby son, Gareth (I've never really liked that name—my father-in-law's), sleeps on. Has there ever been a more narcoleptic infant, I wonder? We wake him, late, and he becomes immediately fractious and angry—isn't it meant to be the other way round?

"Edward," Felicia calls down in her fluting voice, affectionate query thinly disguising domestic command, "could you make me a cup of tea, darling?"

You never liked the town, right from the start. When Dad and Mum parked the car, and Dad stepped out and began to run on the spot, doing his deep-breathing exercises, and you heard Mum make her inevitable remark about the extra oxygen molecules in the ozone, you wandered off, embarrassed by Dad, and contemplated the shingle beach, the mouse-gray sea and the pier and the tawdry stucco of the hotels and the houses. You searched the idlers on the promenade, and the strollers by the surf's edge looking for a sign, some signal that living in this town would be all right, would provide some consolation. A modest quotidian epiphany would have sufficed (you'd been reading Joyce), but your eyes remained unenlightened and your soul sagged again.

Felicia kisses me and I climb into our (her) Volvo. She's pleased that I'm writing these articles, back being a proper journalist again, albeit freelance, earning "real money," as she calls it, secretly delighted that I have abandoned poetry. I spent three weeks on my piece for *Revolver* and she couldn't believe I was doing it unpaid (she did not regard six complimentary offprints of the article as proper recompense). My spending all this time writing "The Image of the Train in Contemporary British Poetry" was not gainful employ, in her opinion. I wanted to say, "But your bank pays you six—no, eight—times as much as I earn in a good year, so why shouldn't I do something I actually take pleasure in?" But some residual shame at being a kept man made me ring Phil (at Felicia's urging, her wheedling) and to my surprise he gave me this commission. And so I kiss my wife goodbye, start the engine, and drive off to research this, my third article on the new generation of women athletes ("sportsbabes") for *Elite* magazine: first the fencer, then the cyclist, now the high jumper.

You were glad you had resisted Mum's urging—her wheedling—that you should find a hostel or a Y.M.C.A., and had insisted, instead, on a bedsit. It was above a bakery, and the smell of warm bread coming through the floorboards seemed to reassure her as she poked around while you and Dad brought up the suitcases and the turntable, the amplifier, and the speakers. The window looked out on the garden, and Mum stood there identifying the shrubs and trees: forsythia, a laurel, sycamore, and lime.

"Ash," Dad said.

"No, lime," Mum insisted. They stood around for a while, reluctant to let you go, reluctant to leave you to your freedom, but your set face, your pointed refusal to suggest a cup of tea or a final stroll, eventually drove them away.

"Bye, Edward, darling," Mum said, kissing you farewell, "don't work too hard."

Dad remonstrated. "Do work too hard—that's what he's here for."

When they left, you put up your posters (I remember the dark girl wrapped in plastic, and Aristide Bruant with his red scarf) and then went to find a pub, the Cornwallis, where you drank a pint of beer and smoked three cigarettes and wondered again how someone as manifestly intelligent as you had managed to fail, splendidly and unequivocally, his best subject at school: history.

The high jumper lives in a sprawling town, halfway between London and the South coast. I have passed through and by it many times and I don't find I like the place at all, and not just because of the jets, flying in low above it on their approach to Gatwick airport. Everything seems "newish," which is worse than new, and everywhere (the tethered saplings, the themed roundabouts, the preponderance of road signs, the neatly planted verges) is evidence of the town planner's homogenizing hand. There is a historic center, but I never even reach it (and so have to imagine its church with the fourth-

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highest steeple in Sussex, the remains of the Norman castle, and the Georgian brewery) as the ring road directs me inexorably toward the football ground and the sports complex where I am to meet Juliana Lewkowitz and watch her train.

At the crammer, the building seemed to reek of personal disappointment. All these students, you realized—just like you—had failed their exams and were here to make academic amends. Your tutor for history was a hard-faced woman called Mrs. Franzler. Mrs. Franzler asked you what university you had applied for and you told her it was Oxford.

"What do you want to read?" she asked.

"History," you said. When she asked you why you had failed your History A level you said you'd had a mini nervous breakdown—had stared at the paper for three hours and not written a word.

"Not a single word?"

"Not even a mark." Her eyes narrowed with suspicious disbelief and she set you an essay of astonishing complexity on the 1815 Corn Laws. "So let's see just how clever you are, then," she said.

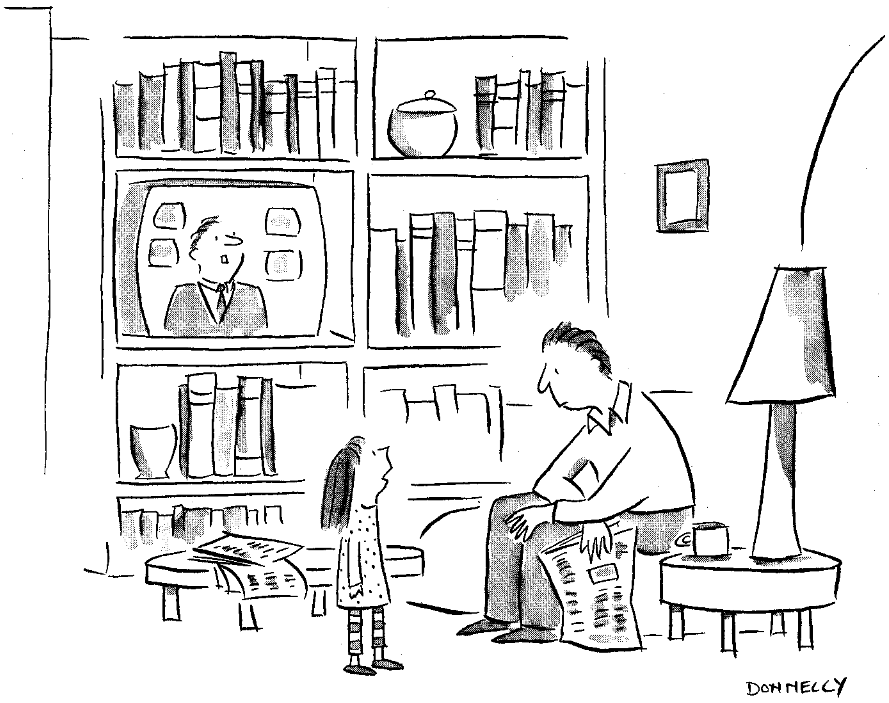
Outside the building, you leaned against a tethered sapling and smoked a consoling cigarette. Then you went home to your bedsit to work, and you saw the girl.

I walk across the stadium toward a small group of athletes in tracksuits, sitting on the grass listening to a taut, overmuscled man in white shorts and a white T-shirt who is reading from a clipboard. "I'm looking for Juliana Lewkowitz," I say. The man ignores me and carries on talking—he's talking about food, about calories, proteins, and carbohydrates. "Excuse me," I say. "Would you mind not interrupting?" the man says coolly, finally looking at me. "I'm from *Elite* magazine," I say, "here to interview Juliana Lewkowitz." I suddenly obtain his full attention. We move away from the others and he introduces himself: "Dale Auden," he says. He's the club coach—Juliana's coach.

"Any relation to W.H.?" I ask.

"W.H. who?" I must stop thinking about poetry. Juliana, it transpires, has a bit of a sniffle. He has sent her home.

You were unlocking your door when the girl came clumping carefully down the stairs from the bedsit above. Her eyes were on her very high heels as she descended sideways, stooped like an old person, fearful she'd fall. Her streaked blond hair hung forward over



"Daddy, can I stop being worried now?"

her face and, as she reached your landing and safety, she straightened up and with both hands swept the hair back over her forehead. At that moment your heart felt taut, overmuscled, and you opened your mouth to gulp more oxygen. You smiled hello.

"Just moved in?" she said.

"Yes."

"Right. See you."

You sat for an hour trying to write something about the Corn Laws and failed. She had a scab on her left knee.

I call Felicia from the Tudor Lodge hotel and explain the Juliana situation: there is no point in driving all the way back to Oxford simply to turn round and drive back here the next day. "Don't forget we've got dinner at Tim and Rosie Mulvehay's, tomorrow," Felicia reminds me. I have forgotten: I wanted to forget. "Don't be back too late," she warns, gently. After I hang up, I realize I've neglected to ask about Gareth.

The Tudor Lodge hotel is just off the ring road, a mile from the sports complex. It is modern, newish, like everything else in this town. It has a gym and a small swimming pool, a pitch-and-putt mini golf course, a bar called the Portcullis and a restaurant called the Escutcheon. Soft-porn films are available on a pay-per-view channel in the privacy of your own room. There is no need for me to leave its precincts.

You were trying to write another of Mrs. Franzler's terrifying essays (on Palmerston's second government, 1859-1865) when the girl knocked on your door. Did you by any chance have a screwdriver, she wanted to know. She needed to change a plug. You didn't have a screwdriver, per se, but you did have, to your vague embarrassment, a multifunction penknife that possessed a screwdriving component and which you were happy to lend her. In the time it took her to change her plug, you managed to tidy your room, boil a kettle, and take down the poster of the dark girl in plastic wrap.

"Thanks very much," the girl said, handing back your penknife.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" you managed to say. And she thought about it for a second and said, "Yes, why not? Wouldn't mind a cup of coffee."

Her name was Yvonne. She wanted to be a nurse. She was working as a cashier in a bookmaker's, trying to save money. She took three sugars. She had a boyfriend called Tony. The scab on her knee (her personal escutcheon) had disappeared. She had been born in Bedford. She declined your offer of a cigarette (she smoked only menthol). She had a pretty, small-featured, pouty, aggressive face—as if she couldn't make up her mind whether to sulk or be angry. She hated this town, too, but it was cheaper than London. Her blond-streaked hair was thick and long. She asked you no questions about yourself. You wondered how you could arrange to let her know your name.

Dale Auden has instructed me to be at the stadium early, at seven, and I arrive as requested, with a mild hangover (three postprandial brandies in the Portcullis while I read Elizabeth Bishop for my next *Revolver* article, "The Impossibility of Desire in the Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop"). To my vague irritation, I am the first person to arrive, and the stadium is locked. A bus pulls up at the nearby bus stop and a tall girl descends, carrying a navy-blue grip, and she comes over toward me. She's wearing jeans and a multi-pocketed cerise windbreaker. Her dark hair is pulled back from her strong Slavic face in a ponytail. She's a good two inches taller than me and I am five feet eleven (all right, five feet ten).

She smiles, showing her white, uneven teeth.

"Hi," she says. "Dale not here yet? Typical."

I say, my breath suddenly short, "You must be Juliana."

"Edward," Yvonne said when you opened the door (who told her your name?). "Can you drive?"

"Yes," you said. "Why?"

"Couldn't do me an enormous favor, could you?"

Yvonne handed you the keys of a cerise Ford Fiesta parked outside the baker's.

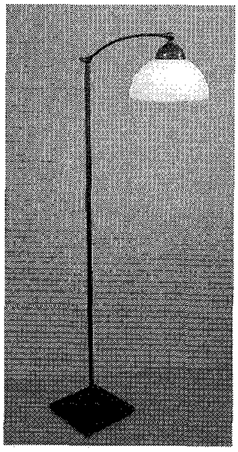
"This your car?"

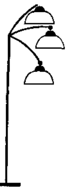
"Tony's," she said with uncommon vehemence. You couldn't help noticing she seemed agitated. "He was meant to be here an hour ago."

"Tony?"

"Bastard."

In the car, Yvonne offered you one





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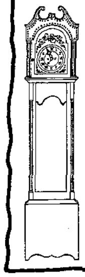

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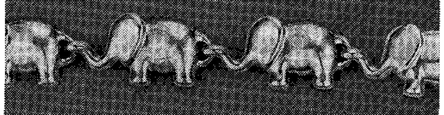

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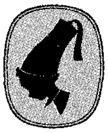

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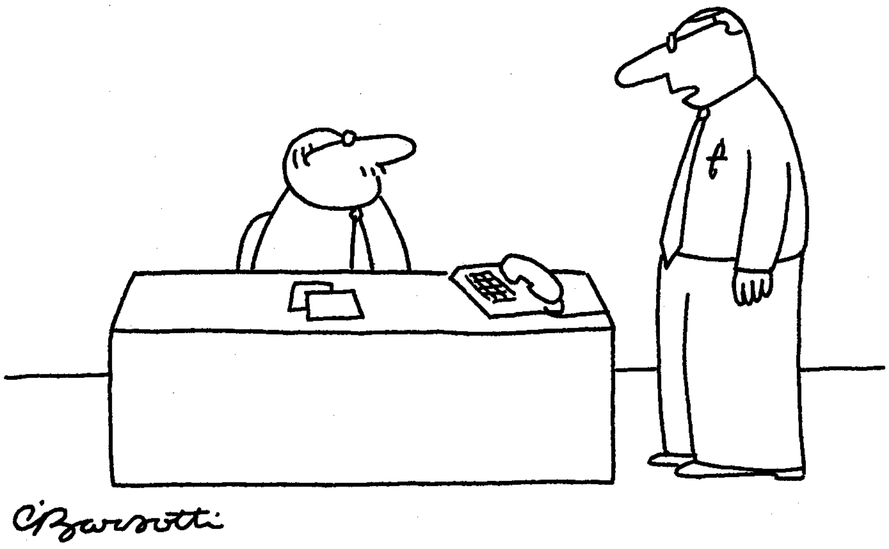

"Bad news, Gilchrist—somehow you've come to someone's attention."

of her menthol cigarettes. You declined.

"I really appreciate this, Edward," she said, pluming smoke at the windscreen. "But it's, you know, kind of like really important."

You said you were glad to help. In fact you were excited to be sitting with this girl in her boyfriend's car, pleased to be leaving your half-finished essay behind (on the decline of villenage in fourteenth-century England) and you couldn't help noticing as you reached to switch on the headlamps how Yvonne's denim skirt had ridden really quite far up her thin pale thighs.

"Where are we off to?" you asked.

"Kent," she said. "Then Gatwick airport."

Dale Auden and I watch Juliana Lewkowitz warm up with a few fifty-metre sprints and continue watching as she strips off. I half listen to Dale drone on (about plyometric exercises, about arm drive and leg plants) as I take in the lanky, lethargic grace of this girl as she bends and stretches. Everything is in proportion but longer, somehow, like an El Greco or a Klimt. I like this notion and decide to open my article with the concept of a Klimt nude made modern athletic flesh. Or maybe an Egon Schiele, I reconsider, as I look at Juliana's thin pale thighs, her arms, her wrists, her fingers. Her minute shorts and vest are made of a stretchy clinging quasi-fabric that reveals the jut of her pelvic bones and flattens her small breasts on her rib cage.

Dale sets the bar of the high jump at what seems to be my height and Juliana paces out her run. Dale, like a drill instructor, is yapping orders ("Lateral lean!" "Leg loading!" "Mass transfer!") as Juliana tightens her ponytail and then begins to rock to and fro as she contemplates her first jump of the day. Then, in a flattening arc, she runs, she lopes, she bounds up to the jump and throws herself up, twisting onto her back, arms and head first, over the bar, straightening her legs as she sails over to land on the inflated mattress—which gives a wheeze and a gasp (of astonishment?) as this flying girl falls backward onto it.

Juliana climbs off, wincing with displeasure at her successful jump, one finger freeing the seam of her tiny shorts from the cleft of her buttocks.

"Crap!" Dale shouts at her. "Absolute crap."

You sat in the Fiesta with Yvonne, parked in a picnic area off a country road. All around you in the darkness lay the county of Kent. Yvonne continued to smoke and fiddled with the radio, searching the airwaves for a station that pleased her. Little contemporary rock music seemed to her taste. She winced with displeasure and switched the radio off.

"What are we actually doing here?" you asked.

"Waiting for someone."

"Oh. Can't you drive?"

"I've been banned. Breathalyzed—over the limit."

"Right."

She looked at you. "What're you doing at that college?"

"The crammer? History. I failed my A level, you see. Retaking the exam."

"Do you want to be a historian?"

You thought about this. "No."

"Why are you doing history, then?"

"It's my best subject."

"But you failed it."

It was a fair point—then somebody opened the rear door of the car and jumped in.

Dale Auden will not leave me alone with Juliana.

"She's two centimetres under the U.K. national record. Going to go next season, isn't it, Juliana?"

"I'll give it my best shot, Dale."

"That's my girl. Oslo here we come."

Juliana is sitting on the running track knotting the laces in her running shoes. She stands up, unfolding herself, undoes her ponytail and shakes her dark glossy hair free. The gestures have a naturalness, an innocence, that unmans me. Dale finally goes away to talk to some hurdlers.

"Would you like to have dinner tonight?" I ask. "I feel I haven't really had a chance to have a proper conversation."

She glances over at Dale—why?

"I don't know," she says.

I tell her I'm staying at the Tudor Lodge, tell her that *Elite* likes its profiles to concentrate on the personal as well as the professional, offer to pick her up from home, have a taxi drive her back. I am very persuasive.

"See you tonight then, Mr. Scully."

"Call me Edward, please."

You turned round in your seat to gain a better view of the small man who had entered the car.

"Who the hell's he?" the small man said, staring at you angrily.

"He's called Edward. Bastard Tony never showed."

"Oh . . . " He seemed to relax and

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wer's Song,' by Andrew
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upper lip. She smoothed the lapels of her short-sleeved jacket, adjusted the lie of her cleavage, unclipped and reclipped an earring. You wondered how much more bizarre and surreal the evening could become.

"Ever been to Majorca, Stephen?"

"Edward."

"Edward."

"No, but I've been to Barcelona."

"Never been to Barcelona. Las Palmas?"

"Ah, the Canaries."

"Las Islas Canarias."

"Never been there."

Tommy and Yvonne returned, Tommy, unable to keep the smile off his face, with news that the charter flight to Majorca had now been cancelled. Irene didn't believe him, and even when an announcement followed quickly she still insisted that you accompany her to the desk to confirm that this was so. The flight was indeed cancelled: there was an air-traffic-controller's strike in France affecting most European flights. To your consternation, tears began to brim in Irene's eyes.

"This is what happens to me, Edward. I can never be happy. Just when I think my life's going O.K. and finally I'm going to be happy, this sort of thing always happens to me."

"Maybe it's fate," you said. "You never know. Think of the kids. Maybe you're not meant to go."

She ran a knuckle under each eye as she considered this, then she reached for your hand and squeezed it. You felt her long nails bite into your palm.

"Thanks, Ed. Truly. Thanks."

In the foyer of the Tudor Lodge hotel, I stand with Juliana waiting for her taxi. I feel a form of panic stirring in me, like a skittish animal. I can't let this girl go.

"Juliana," I say. "If you come up to my room I can show you that poem."

"What poem?"

"The Juliana poem."

"I'd better get back."

"I'd like to write a book about you. A book of your life."

"There's my taxi."

I want to kiss her but I realize I will have to stretch my neck and stand slightly on my toes to do so. I step toward her and she freezes. The Impossibility of Desire in the Poetry of . . . Juliana's height suddenly makes me ridiculous. She stands there looking at me, wary, unsure—unhappy, maybe: maybe I've spoiled something. She thanks me for the supper, and I watch her leave through the thick plate glass of the Tudor Lodge hotel's front door. As she bends into the taxi she turns and gives me a brisk, brief, final wave.

It was dawn by the time you parked the cerise Fiesta outside the bakery.

"What a night," Yvonne said. "I can't believe Irene's staying. What did you say to her?"

"I don't really know," you said. Irene and Tommy had had a few words, and then Irene had taken a taxi back to her mother's, where she'd left her children. On the return journey to the open prison Tommy had been reflective, asking you several times to repeat the exchange you'd had with Irene. Tommy patted you gratefully on the shoulder, kissed Yvonne, and slipped out of the car and into the night.

"It's just across the fields," Yvonne said. "They come and go all the time, Tommy says."

"Don't they have guards at this prison?" you asked.

"Of course. But they trust the prisoners. That's why it's called an 'open prison.' "

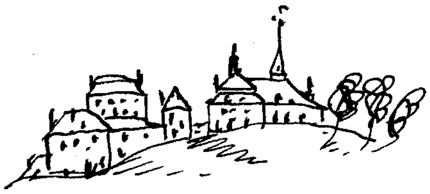
You followed Yvonne up the stairs, your eyes on the pale-blue veins showing on the backs of her knees. At that moment you wanted to do nothing more than reach out and run your hand over her flexing calf muscle. You felt desire stir in you like a skittish animal.

You paused on the landing, fished in your pocket for the key.

"Do you want a cup of coffee, or anything?" you asked. You could see yourself in your narrow bed with Yvonne, belly to belly. You could smell her, feel her thick hair drag across your chest.

"Better get some sleep. Got work in three hours."

She backed away, slumped like a marionette for a moment to feign extreme exhaustion, straightened with a smile, and blew you a kiss. As evanescent as a



blown kiss, you thought. What could be more insubstantial?

"Thanks a million, Ed. See you later, maybe."

I tell Dale Auden I don't like his tone. Don't like his implications.

"And I don't like you, full stop," he says.

We are in the car park. I throw my grip into the back of the Volvo and turn to face him. He jabs his finger at me.

"You asked her up to your room."

"To continue the interview."

"Bloody pervert."

I try to punch him in the face but he raises his arm and I strike his shoulder instead, hard. With astonishing speed he immobilizes me with some kind of double armlock and hisses threats and obscenities into my ear. Then he pushes me brusquely away and I career into a shrub—twigs snap.

"I'm going to call your editor," he says. "Pervert."

"Get a life!" I shout at him. He laughs at that and wanders off. I flex my fingers: my hand hurts. Get a life.

You found the continued clattering and tramping up and down the stairs an irritation and eventually looked out of your room. Yvonne and a guy in a leather coat were coming down from her bedsit, Yvonne carrying a suitcase, the guy lugging a cardboard box.

"Hi," you said, surprised. "Want a hand?"

"No, thanks, we're fine, thanks. This is Tony."

Tony nodded and grinned hello at you above his cardboard box.

"Moving out?" you said, suddenly realizing.

"Yeah. Going to Penzance."

"Cornwall? My God. Never been to Cornwall."

"Come and see us," Yvonne said.

Five minutes later, she came back up the stairs and knocked on your door.

"I forgot to tell you," she said. "Irene went to Majorca. Yesterday. Took the kids with her this time."

"God."

"Just goes to show."

You tried to understand this news, wondering if in some way you were responsible.

"How's Tommy?"

"He's a bit cut up. Not surprising, really."

"Yeah."

You stood there in your room with Yvonne and you both thought about that night you had shared, silent for a few seconds. Then you looked at each other. You flexed your fingers.

"I'll send you a change of address card," she said, softly.

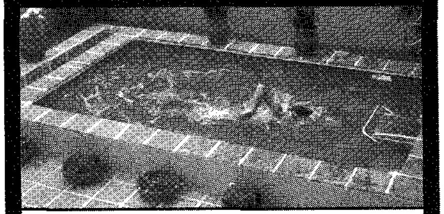
"Don't forget," you said, but you knew she would.

Then she stepped forward, took your head in her hands and kissed you hard, with a small clash of teeth, and her tongue was in your mouth, squirming, flickering. But before you could grab her she was gone, backing out of the room, with a wicked, half-suppressed smile on her face, and Tony was honking the horn of the cerise Fiesta in the street below. You heard her heels rapping the stairs.

You went and sat at your desk, trying to stay calm, thinking about Yvonne and the way she had kissed you. You knew it would be something you would never forget, that it would become one of those events that shaped and defined you as a person, a key link in the chain mail of memories woven through your life. As you looked out the window, you noticed that a slanting ray of the morning sun had squeezed between two houses and touched the higher branches of the lime tree at the bottom of the garden, turning its dusty, tired summer leaves into shimmering coins of lemon-green, making the tree seem young again, and making you think of spring.

When I arrive at the house, I find it empty. Felicia will have taken Gareth out in his stroller. The day is mild and breezy, the clouds swift in the blue sky. It's only three o'clock in the afternoon, but I pour myself two inches of vodka and fill the glass with ice cubes and brace myself for the row that will surely come.

I sip my drink, feeling my lips numb slowly, and look out of the window. The clouds move, and a sudden angle of afternoon sun slanting over the top of the next-door house touches the uppermost branches of the old lime tree at the end of the garden. For a moment, a thick wand of sun turns its tired summer leaves into refulgent coins of lemony green, making the tree seem young again and making me think of spring. ♦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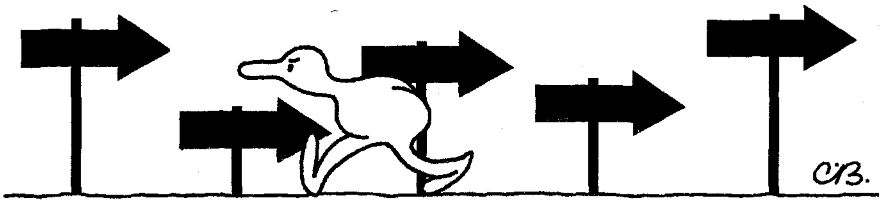


BOOKS

FLESH ON FLESH

A semi-Austenesque novel from Ian McEwan.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Ian McEwan, whose novels have tended to be short, smart, and saturnine, has produced a beautiful and majestic fictional panorama, "Atonement" (Doubleday; $26). The novel's first half takes place over two summer days in 1935, on a Surrey estate occupied by the Tallis family: Jack, the head of the household, whose work for the Ministry of Defense keeps him night after night in London; Emily, his wife, who is prone to migraines and long spells of daydreaming in her bed; Leon, the eldest child and only son, twenty-five and working in London in a modest position at a bank, though he has a law degree; his sister Cecilia, younger by two years, fresh from her finals at Cambridge, bored and at loose ends; and our heroine, thirteen-year-old Briony, given to posing philosophical questions and perusing the thesaurus, and for the past two years an increasingly active writer. She has just composed a play, "The Trials of Arabella," to be performed in honor of her brother's homecoming. He is bringing a wealthy friend, Paul Marshall, and there are three cousins just arrived from the north, the Quinceys—Lola, fifteen, and nine-year-old twins, Jackson and Pierrot—who are to act in Briony's play. The three are refugees from a broken household: Aunt Hermione, Emily Tallis's younger sister, has run off to Paris with "a man who worked in the wireless." To this cast of characters add some servants and the anomalous figure of Robbie Turner. Robbie is the son of the Tallises' former gardener; when the boy's father deserted him and his mother, they were charitably taken up by Jack Tallis, who gave Grace Turner the gardener's bungalow and has paid for Robbie's education, including three years at Cambridge. He has just passed his finals with a first in literature, while Cecilia earned only a third. Though at Cambridge simultaneously, they rarely met there, and are tense and awkward with each other this summer, in the domain where they grew up together. They, it is perhaps not too much to reveal, supply the novel's love interest.

McEwan's epigraph is from Jane Austen, and promises a spacious family novel of humorous interplay, romantic intrigues, and near-tragic misunderstandings. The promise is to some extent kept; the homesick twins and the blossoming, manipulative Lola inject disturbance into the stagnant Tallis household. But in the warmth of these days, the year's hottest, a Virginia Woolfian shimmer overlays the Austenish plot, which keeps threatening to dissolve. The play, for example, does not go on (until sixty-four years later). Jack Tallis, the powerful absentee Old Man, an offstage deus ex machina, never descends. Instead, amid many images of water and vegetation and architectural nicety, various viewpoints backtrack and overlap, and certain scenes are replayed from widely different perspectives. The writing is conspicuously good; and this goodness turns out to be, eventually, a subject of criticism—by Cyril Connolly, no less—in a droll show of artistic self-reference, although in the meantime it works an authentic spell. Picture after picture, in the haze of this midsummer, arises to challenge and flatter the reader's capacity for visualization. At a key moment, a precious vase is tussled over, and a fragment breaks off and falls into a fountain:

> With a sound like a dry twig snapping, a section of the lip of the vase came away in his hand, and split into two triangular pieces which dropped into the water and tumbled to the bottom in a synchronous, see-sawing motion, and lay there, several inches apart, writhing in the broken light.

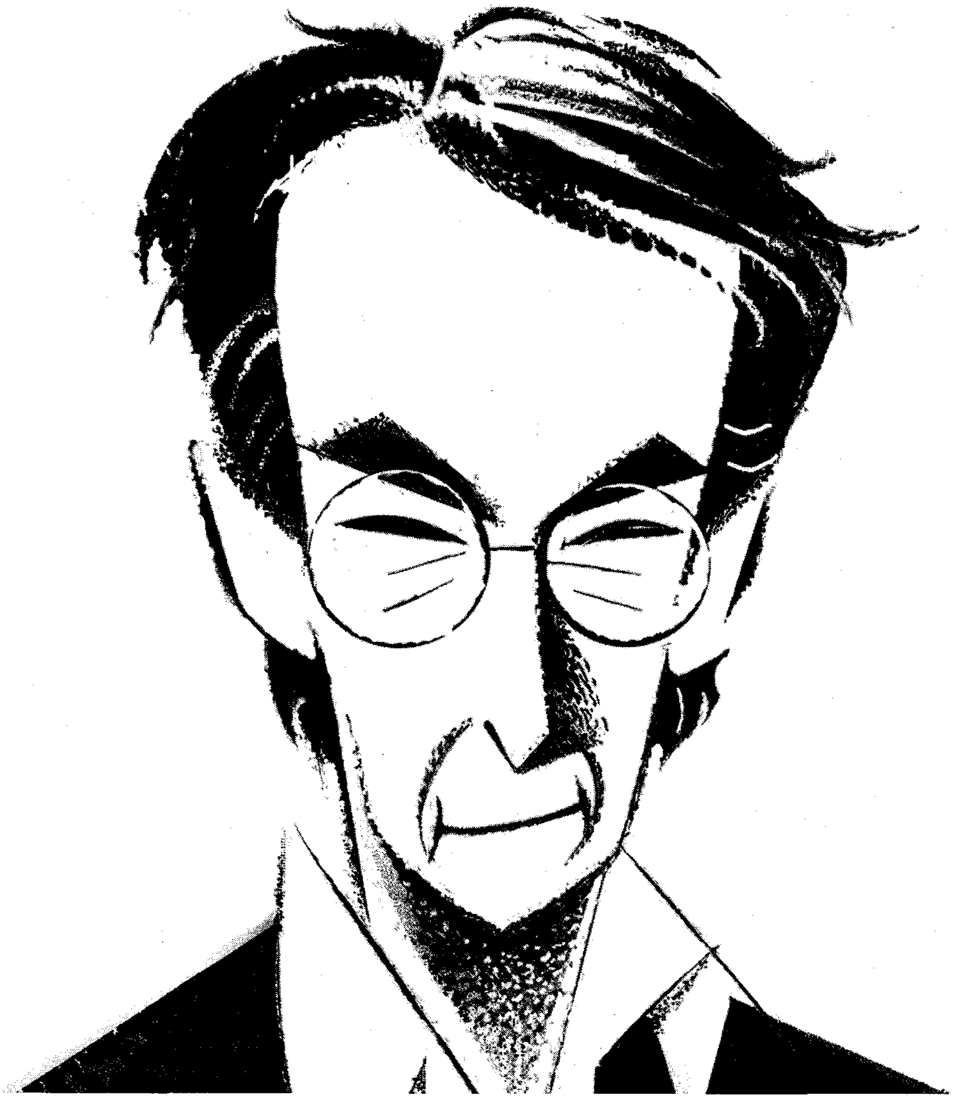
That seesawing synchronicity, that writhing in the broken light show us more than we had expected to see. A seemingly half-baked comparison to savanna writhes on, renews itself, and ends with a smiling metaphoric flourish:

> Then, nearer, the estate's open parkland, which today had a dry and savage look, roasting like a savanna, where isolated trees threw harsh stumpy shadows and the long grass was already stalked by the leonine yellow of high summer.

The reader, seeing through Cecilia's languid eyes, is brought up short by virtually abstract images:

> She lolled against the warm stone, lazily finishing her cigarette and contemplating the scene before her—the foreshortened slab of chlorinated water, the black inner tube of a tractor tyre propped against a deck chair, the two men in cream linen suits of infinitesimally different hues, bluish-gray smoke rising against the bamboo green.

"Infinitesimally different hues" is the mode, as skyscapes, physiognomies, gestures ("She turned aside and made a steeple of her hands to enclose her nose and mouth and pressed her fingers into the corners of her eyes"), and scents ("the grasses giving off their sweet cattle smell, the hard-fired earth which still held the embers of the day's heat and exhaled the mineral odor of clay, and the faint breeze carrying from the lake a flavor of green and silver") are evoked with a delicious care and verbal cunning. *This is written*, each page subliminally announces, and that undercurrent prepares the reader for the atonement of the title: Briony, the writer and the character becoming one, atones for a childish blunder with a mature woman's fiat of creation. Even at the age of thirteen she exults to herself, "There was nothing she could not describe."



In his fictional panorama "Atonement," McEwan captures the tastes and sights of a past he did not witness even as a child.

ERIC PALMA

The novel's second section transports us to another prose climate, as the terrors and confusions of the British retreat to Dunkirk in 1940 are harrowingly detailed. Some of the details are surprising and piquant—a caged parrot caught up in the chaotic scramble, a peasant with his collie plowing a field in intervals between bombing and strafing attacks, soldiers shooting their horses in the head and their motorized vehicles in the radiator. In the desperately crowded and underprovisioned conditions around Dunkirk, British soldiers threaten and assault one another while the enemy swoops overhead and the R.A.F. and the Royal Navy fail to materialize. As a whole, the section is gripping, but it is not extraordinary, quite, like the novel's first half. The element of the marvellous—the latently menacing seethe of the everyday—has been replaced by the more vulgar excitement of overt peril. If we marvel, it is at the ability of contemporary English writers (McEwan was born in 1948) to capture the tastes and sights of a past they did not witness even as children. It is as if the earlier generation of writers—Waugh, Greene, Green, Golding, Powell, Orwell, Bowen, Spark, and dozens of lessers—had laid down, on this dense island soil, an accessible past, while Americans must reinvent their more scattered country from scratch. The imaginary writer of "Atonement" in her last pages expresses her debt to the research facilities at the Imperial War Museum, in Lambeth, and to an "old colonel" who has testily corrected her terminology and fine points. Her sixty pages of war's turmoil are followed by sixty of war's bitter fruits, in the form of the atrocious casualties that Briony, who has signed up as a probationer nurse, witnesses and learns to minister to. She extracts shrapnel, talks French to a young man who dies in her arms, removes the bandages from a blasted face:

> Using a pair of surgical tongs, she began carefully pulling away the sodden, congealed lengths of ribbon gauze from the cavity in the side of his face. When the last was out, the resemblance to the cutaway model they used in anatomy classes was only faint. This was all ruin, crimson and raw. She could see through his missing cheek to his upper and lower molars, and the tongue glistening, and hideously long.

The reader will possibly recall how the novel's lovers, in their moment of mutual possession, find their way to unselfconscious passion through "the contact of tongues, alive and slippery muscle, moist flesh on flesh." Lust and disgust keep close company; in McEwan's hypnotic first novel, "The Cement Garden" (1978), an-

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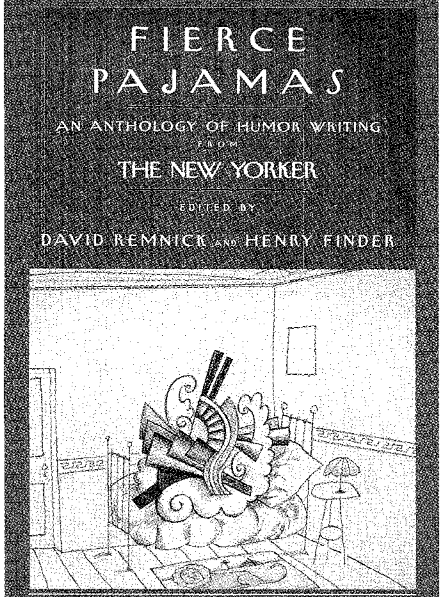

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–*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

RANDOM HOUSE

EARLY OCCULT MEMORY SYSTEMS OF THE LOWER MIDWEST

In his fifth year the son, deep in the back seat
of his father's Ford and the *mysterium*
of time, holds time in memory with words,
night, this night, on the way to a stalled rig south
of Kiowa Creek where the plains wind stacks
the skeletons of weeds on barbed-wire fences
and rattles the battered DeKalb sign to make
the child think of time in its passing, of death.

Cattle stare at flatbed haulers gunning clumps
of black smoke and lugging damaged drill pipe
up the gullied, mud-hollowed road. *Road, this
road.* Roustabouts shouting from the crow's nest
float like Ascension angels on a ring of lights.
Chokecherries gouge the purpled sky, cloud
swags running the moon under, and starlight
rains across the Ford's blue hood. *Blue, this blue.*

Later, where black flies haunt the mud tank,
the boy walks along the pipe rack dragging
a stick across the hollow ends to make a kind
of music, and the creek throbs with frog songs,
locusts, the rasp of tree limbs blown and scattered.
The great horse people, his father, these sounds,
these things saved from time's dark creek as the car
moves across the moving earth: *world, this world.*

—*B. H. Fairchild*

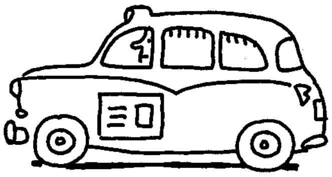
other set of children left to their own devices, in another summer of unusual heat, experience the debility and putrescence of the body as well as its tabooed allure. "Atonement" concerns, among other historical phenomena, puritanism in 1935, when an impulsive four-letter word in a man's love letter could draw the attention of the authorities. The frail, moist flesh, mutilated in war, corseted and shamed in peacetime, and subject, in the long view, to swift decay, gives this intricately composed narrative its mournful, surging life. The poems of Auden and Housman are talismanic volumes within its furniture, and "Clarissa" with its scribbling heroine, but equally prominent is Gray's "Anatomy."

The novel's bloody illustrations of the horrors of war compel assent and pity, and yet, such is the novel reader's romantic nature, it is the lovers that keep us turning the page; theirs is the consummation we devoutly wish. Our wish is granted, but with a duplicitous art. "Atonement," in its tenderness and doubleness and final effect of height, in its postmodern concern with its own writing, and in its central topic of two upper-class sisters in the period between the world wars, has a striking happenstance resemblance to Margaret Atwood's "The Blind Assassin." Both revert, from the perspective of an old woman facing death near the bloated end of the twentieth century, to an era when a certain grandeur could attach to human decisions, made as they were under the shadow of global war and in living memory of the faded virtues—loyalty and honesty and valor—that sought to soften what McEwan calls the "iron principle of self-love." People could still dedicate a life, gamble it on one throw. Compared with today's easy knowingness and self-protective irony, feelings then had a hearty naïveté, a force developed amid repression and scarcity and linked to a sense of transcendent adventure; novels need this force, and must find it where they can, if only in the annals of the past. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Future of Life, *by Edward O. Wilson (Knopf; $22).* The central thesis of this elegant manifesto is not unfamiliar: the impact of human population growth and "wasteful consumption" on the biological diversity of our planet has been nothing short of disastrous. What distinguishes Wilson's book, though, is its nuanced and evocative explanation of just why biodiversity matters, and its surprisingly optimistic diagnosis of how this natural balance might be preserved. Wilson, an eminent evolutionary biologist, shows the extent to which human prosperity, even in the information age, rests on the foundation of a diverse natural world, since the more species any ecosystem has, the more stable and productive it will be. And he writes movingly of the need to accept the responsibility of environmental "stewardship." That stewardship doesn't require Draconian government regulation, in his view; instead, we could rely on nongovernmental organizations, private corporations, and intelligent use of the free market. If we act wisely, the world will remain a place where, as the scientist Michael Faraday put it, "nothing is too wonderful to be true."

Servants of the Map, *by Andrea Barrett (Norton; $24.95).* The six stories that make up this collection turn out to be connected, but you won't know exactly how until you read the last one—which comes together satisfyingly not only with its fellows but with the author's last two books, "Ship Fever" and "The Voyage of the Narwhal." The common thread here quickly becomes apparent: almost every protagonist is a would-be botanist or entomologist or geologist. In one story, a young husband on a years-long mapping expedition in the Himalayas yearns for recognition through the plant samples he gathers; in another, a little girl demonstrates her crush on her parents' friend by collecting bugs with him; in a third, a schoolteacher meets his future wife while searching for fossils. Like fossil-hunters, most of Barrett's characters are looking for a way to piece together fragments of the past; when, in the last story, a cherished belonging of one character shows up in the life of another, we feel rescued and redeemed.



Palladio, *by Jonathan Dee (Doubleday; $24.95).* At the heart of this old-fashioned morality tale are two stories. Molly Howe, a pretty girl who knows how alluring silence can be, flees her bleak home town for Berkeley, circa 1989, and falls for an art-history student, John Wheelwright. Eight years later, John becomes the protégé of the imperious Malcolm Osbourne, who has founded a cutting-edge ad agency, Palladio—where, like characters in "Cymbeline," John and Molly are fated to meet again. Dee's skill in delineating loss and desire saves this extremely well-written book from its less successful attempts to skewer our material culture.

The Fall of Rome, *by Martha Southgate (Scribner; $23).* "White people were everywhere, hair flopping in their eyes, that faint wet-dog smell." A controlled fury propels this novel about a token black teacher at an élite New England boarding school. Jerome Washington is a classics scholar who, armed with a Harvard education and an accent purged of his Georgia-sharecropper roots, has spent his life trying to defeat racism through sheer decorum. But his hermetic existence is threatened by the arrival of a black student from a Brooklyn ghetto and a white female teacher who fancies herself a champion of the underprivileged. The author shows her hand too early; still, she remains true to the enigma of her hero, and her rendering of his voice—pensive, rueful, and entirely devoid of self-pity—is convincing. Although we know that his downfall is inevitable, it moves us just the same.

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THE ART WORLD

THE GOOD GERMAN

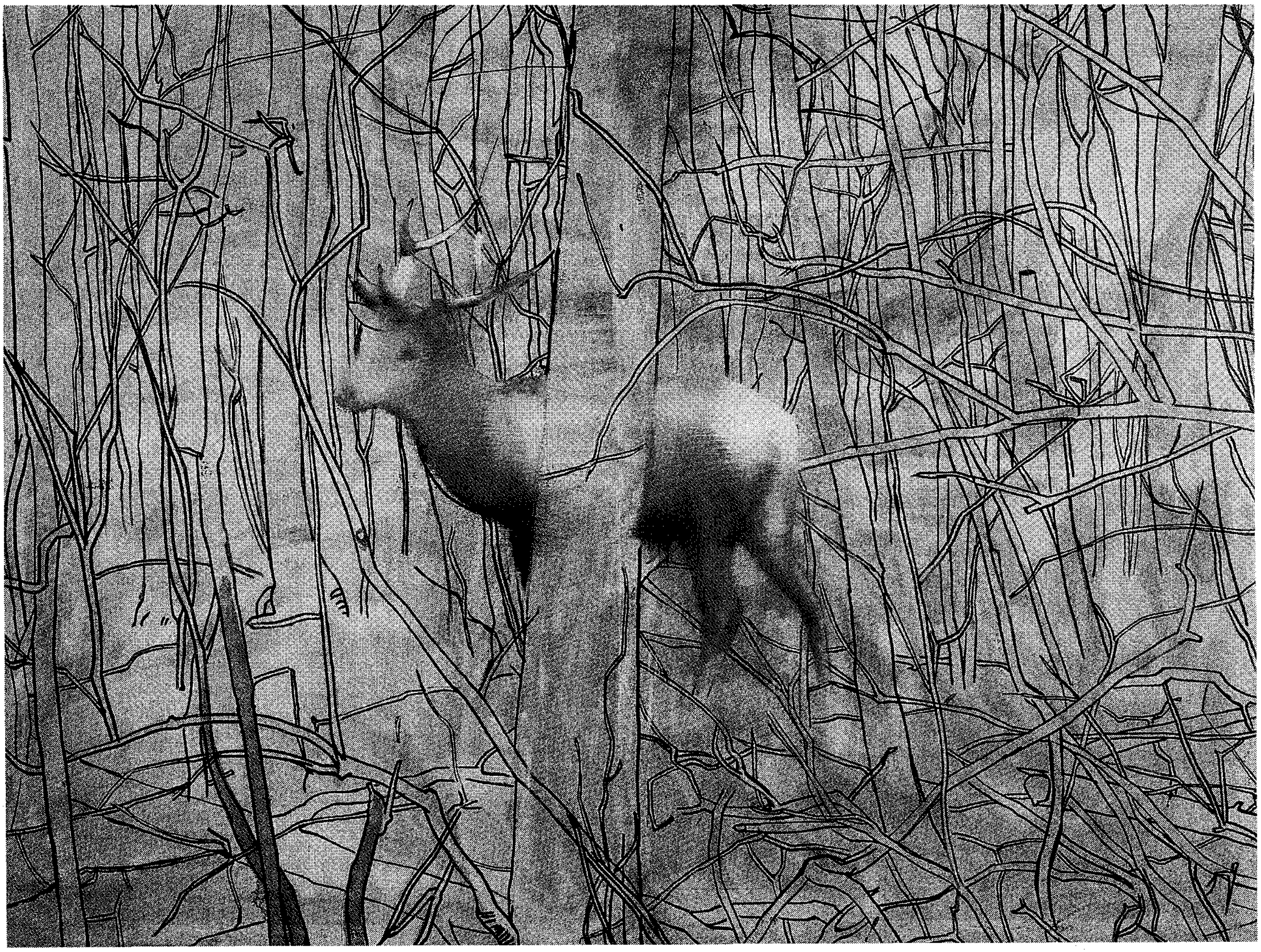
Gerhard Richter's triumphant sorrow.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

The German painter Gerhard Richter, who is the subject of a magnificent retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, is famous for severity, hermeticism, and all-around, intimidating difficulty. His range of styles—from Pop to minimal to photo-realist and several varieties of abstract—has seemed perversely promiscuous, as if he were heaping obloquy on the very idea of style. An old friend of the artist, the prominent critic Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, used to insist that Richter's work was a calculated demonstration of painting's bankruptcy as a viable art. (In a celebrated interview with Buchloh, Richter flatly rejected the notion.) Even longtime admirers of Richter's work, including me, have more or less assumed that it speaks to arcane, insider concerns and tastes. But what do you know? Surveyed in depth for the first time in the United States, his forty-year career comes off as a resounding hosanna of piquant, good, and great paintings, with something for everyone.

Richter is a philosophical artist, not a philosopher of art. That's the verdict of the show, which has been brilliantly installed by the artist and Robert Storr, a senior curator in MOMA's Department of Painting and Sculpture. Richter has taken on the big critical issues in painting since the nineteen-sixties. He has seemed close at times to the position of theorists who argue that technological advances and deconstructive analysis render the old medium obsolete. And Richter's ways of working—they include making oil copies of banal photographs and creating abstractions with a swiftly wielded squeegee—might seem like anti-painting when you think about it. But trying to think at this show is like trying to play three-dimensional chess while drunk. One work after another attains a sublimely pleasurable stillness and silence.

Why has Richter played so many games? Judging from the evidence at MOMA, his aim is to elude the tyranny of any one game, be it conservative or radical. He will not be pinned down. Art is his means of awakening from the nightmare of history, which is a strategy common to Germans of his



"Stag" (1963) can be seen as a spiritual self-portrait by an artist who is inspired by the great rifts in art and history.

generation. Seen together, the tactics of his many phases—including excursions into muddy monochromes and austere color charts—cancel each other out; a troubled but passionate will to paint shines through. The show made me wonder why I ever regarded Richter as cold. His stuff aches with emotion, both personal and political, including rage and sorrow at the toll inflicted by a century of disastrous ideologies.

Richter was born in Dresden in 1932. His father, a schoolteacher and a member of the Nazi Party, served in the war. So did two of his uncles, both of whom were killed. Richter, inevitably, joined the Hitler Jugend. The military glamour excited him, but he hated the company. "I always knew I was something better," he told Storr in an interview for the show's superb catalogue. He traces that sense of himself to his mother, a concert pianist's daughter, who, he said, "always kept me close to 'culture,' to Nietzsche, Goethe and Wagner." In 1946, his father returned from an American P.O.W. camp to, as Richter put it, "most fathers' fate at the time: nobody wanted them." Themes of lost or dishonored fathers recur in his art, most spectacularly in a gloomy suite of forty-eight grisaille paintings (1971-1972) of older male culture heroes, among them Puccini, William James, Max Planck, and Franz Kafka. In the sixties, Richter unnerved his countrymen with paintings of American and British warplanes. One painting shows his doomed Uncle Rudi in Wehrmacht uniform; in another his father looks pathetically buffoonish. Turning to more recent history, he lit the fuse of a furious controversy with a fifteen-canvas history painting, "October 18, 1977," about the Baader-Meinhof group of terrorists, whose deaths in prison (surely by suicide, though conspiracy theories linger) climaxed a purgatorial decade in Germany. I've seen that saturnine masterpiece many times over the years, and I've given up trying to fathom its message, if it has one. I only know that it hits me harder every time.

COURTESY MOMA

One of Richter's first jobs, in 1950, was in an East German workshop for propaganda, where he cleaned slogans off political banners to prepare them for updated exhortations. He soon became a successful mural painter in the prescribed mode of socialist realism. On trips to the West, he was exposed to works by Jackson Pollock, Lucio Fontana, and other innovative artists, which opened a new world to him. In 1961, before the Wall went up, he escaped to West Berlin with his wife, Ema Eufinger. At the Art Academy in Düsseldorf, he met Joseph Beuys and encountered fellow East German refugees, notably the volcanically creative Sigmar Polke. Richter and Polke later went their separate ways, but for a while they formed one of the great duos in modern art. Inspired by Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, they conceived a mordant German variant of Pop art, which they called Capitalist Realism. For Richter, it involved hand-copying photographs from sensational tabloids, advertisements, pornography, and family snapshots—and "unpainting" them by smearing the wet oils. Now and then, he was moved to do something of surprising loveliness, such as the golden blur of a nude Ema descending a staircase.

One of the first paintings in the show is a work from 1963 entitled "Stag." Hazy gray, dragged strokes describe the antlered beast. A surrounding thicket is all perfunctory black lines. A flat vertical band—a tree trunk—cuts across the stag's body, contradicting depth illusions. (The animal stands behind the tree, but the tree reads visually as background.) Phlegmatic and drab, the work is not alluring; nonetheless, its air of tense deliberation gets under a viewer's skin. Does "Stag" endorse or mock its subject, which is a well-worn sentimental symbol in Germany? Both and neither is my guess. At MOMA, I found it useful to keep the riven stag in mind as a spiritual self-portrait and touchstone of the artist. Richter has a homing instinct for rifts of many kinds. I think he will go down in history for having resolved the conflict between representation and abstraction in painting. By alternating idealist figurative works and matter-of-fact abstractions, he asserts convincingly that they amount to the same thing: a painting is a painting. For Richter, abstraction is simply a late entry in the inventory of genres—history painting, portraiture, still-life, landscape—all of which he has made his own.

But Richter's art is never show-offy—not even when he comes close to fulfilling his desire to paint like Vermeer, as he does in some tender pictures of his third wife, Sabine Moritz, and their baby son. "Betty," a Vermeeresque painting from 1988 of a daughter from his first marriage, in which she is turned away from the viewer toward a monochrome canvas, seems to me the single sharpest blow struck in recent art-world debates about the virtues of aesthetic pleasure. It is a one-punch knockout for a revival of beauty. Richter makes no bones about his inability to match his own artistic ideals. "Unfortunately I am not a virtuoso at all," he said to Storr. But he added, "I have some taste." He sure does. His art keenly laments both the shattered tradition of the Old Masters—for example, a befogged, ravishing copy of an Annunciation by Titian—and the radicalism of the great modern shatterers, such as Duchamp and Warhol, who can no longer be emulated except academically. For Richter, honest ambition in painting must now be accompanied by elegiac admissions of loss: fragments shored against a ruin. The sheer quantity of work in the show has a striking effect on his art's despairing fits and starts. Without cohering, the fragments begin to sketch a state of abounding joy.

Except for a sculptural installation and two interesting works made with mirrored glass—in one of them, adjustable panels either double your reflection or eliminate it—the show is restricted to paintings, leaving for future occasions Richter's prolific output of prints and multiples and his tours de force in other mediums. Looming in the memory of Richter admirers is "Atlas: 1964-1995," the vast, continuing documentation of his works and their sources, which was shown at the Dia Center for the Arts in 1995; it's a sort of one-man visual Library of Congress. Richter is an artist of prodigious scope, whose full significance remains to be discovered. What's now clear is that the discovery will be an expedition open to all. ♦

MUSICAL EVENTS

LOVE AND DEATH

The Met unfurls "War and Peace."

BY ALEX ROSS

To make an opera out of "War and Peace" seems like a conceptual mistake. Tolstoy's novel is, among other things, an assault on the great-man theory of history, dismantling the illusions of individuals and exposing the nameless, anarchistic energies that drive life forward. Napoleon's reputation has never quite recovered from the novel's Battle of Borodino scenes, in which the Emperor is made out to be neither magnificent nor malignant but simply irrelevant. This is not how opera sees the world. Opera is an art of grand personalities, of illusion and exaggeration. Our vision of musical history is the great-man theory in excelsis: the canonical composers look down at us like the heroes of Valhalla. It is no surprise that Tolstoy parodied opera alongside Freemasonry as one of the chief idiocies of high society, and praised folk song as the only truly authentic music. But what is "War and Peace" if not a self-consciously great and difficult work? Readers would not bother with it unless they believed in advance that its author was a generalissimo of the written word.

If a "War and Peace" opera had to be done, Sergei Prokofiev must have seemed the wrong person to do it. He had made his name with the "Scythian Suite" and the "Classical" Symphony, with machine-age rhythms and satirical pastiches. But there was an unexpected earnestness behind the urbane façade; Prokofiev, no less than Shostakovich, wished to map his country's destiny in sound. An exile in America and in Paris throughout the early Bolshevik years, he returned to Russia in 1936, and wrote the first version of "War and Peace" during the Second World War. He revised it in the late forties and early fifties, during the period of the 1948 Zhdanov Decree, which attacked obscurantist tendencies in the music of leading Soviet composers. The fact that Prokofiev had padded his opera with patriotic choruses failed to impress the authorities, who went out of their way to humiliate him. He died in 1953, having never heard his masterpiece complete.

And a masterpiece it is: Prokofiev made a successful stab at an impossible job. The note of detachment in his style—the everlasting icy grace—approximated Tolstoy's magisterial narrative voice, which always had a caustic undertow. Prokofiev's inability to dramatize his inner life in the manner of Shostakovich may have made him the lesser of the two in the symphonic arena, but it stood him in good stead in the more objective realm of "War and Peace." His ability to pick up the tempo of wildly disparate scenes, which he honed through his film work with Sergei Eisenstein, allowed him to address the entire sweep of the novel, from ballroom to battlefield. The first part of the opera centers on young Natasha Rostova, the purehearted but woefully unfocussed daughter of an impoverished landowning family, who falls in love with the Hamlet-like Prince Andrei and then with the scoundrel Kuragin. The second part tells of the Battle of Borodino, Napoleon's occupation of Moscow, and the subsequent winter retreat; the nightmare of history becomes a backdrop for the second meeting of Natasha and Andrei and for their tragic reconciliation.

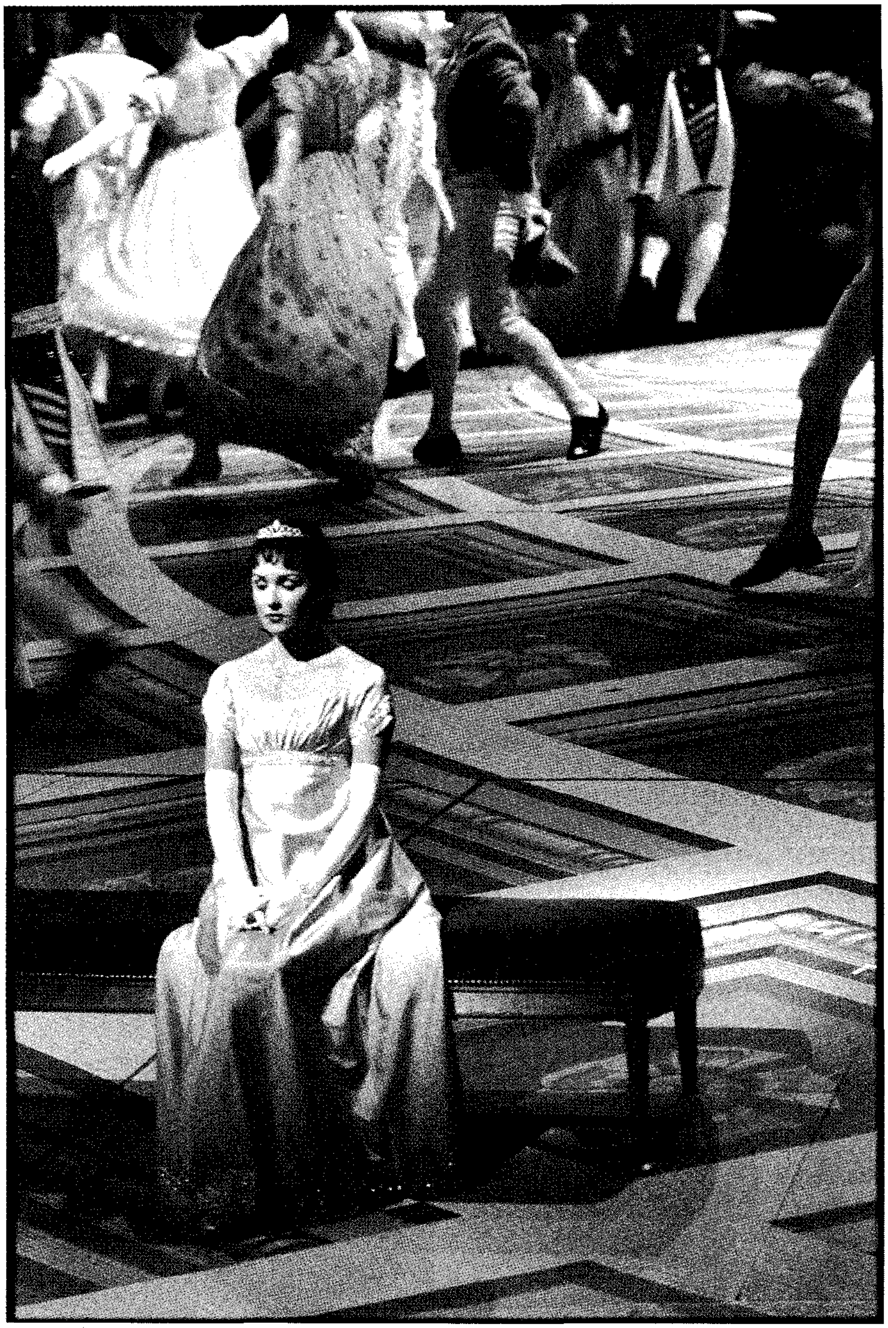
Admittedly, the score has some dry patches. The bombastic newsreel music accompanying Marshal Kutuzov's patriotic monologues is an all-too-blatant attempt to comply with Stalinist aesthetics. (Scene 10, in which Kutuzov discusses battle tactics with his generals, could easily be dropped altogether.) Infinitely more gripping is the music given to Natasha, who sings an endless melody of wayward beauty. The ballroom dances and salon tunes of Part I have a glorious lilt and carry with them an undercurrent of emotional unease. In the first few minutes of the opera, all the faded beauty of the Rostov household fills the air. It occurred to me, as Prokofiev's off-kilter waltz themes revolved in the orchestra, that the opera is like Ravel's "La Valse" stretched out on an enormous canvas: here, too, a golden age is spinning fitfully into oblivion. "Valse! Valse! Valse! Mesdames!" shouts the Host of the Ball, over a sinister vamp in the bass. This is Tolstoy to the core: a mirage of splendor, the pistons of history churning in the background.

The Met's "War and Peace" is a truly awesome thing—the most visually compelling opera production that I have seen in New York in many years. A co-venture with the Maryinsky Theatre, in St. Petersburg, it was directed by the filmmaker Andrei Konchalovsky, with sets by George Tsypin, costumes by Tatiana Noginova, and lighting by James Ingalls. The team's strongest work comes in Part II, at precisely the moments when Prokofiev's inspiration flags. The succession of scenes around the burning of Moscow—religious madmen in a sadomasochistic procession, a dreamlike skyline aglow with flame, Napoleon reviewing the chaos on his white steed, the chorus marching forward with torches in their hands—echoes some of the great tours de force of the Russian cinema, such as the sacking of Vladimir Cathedral in Tarkovsky's "Andrei Rublev," a film which Konchalovsky worked on in his youth.

The aristocratic settings in Part I, however, are a shade too precious and fantastic—they don't smack of the real. The vertiginous downward curve of the stage floor gives the ballroom scenes an overwrought surreal quality. We get the point, early and often—the world is changing, the world is changing. But there are magical details throughout, and many of them take on a deeper significance toward the end. Ingalls should have taken a solo bow for the lighting: with the help of Elaine McCarthy's projections, he creates the illusion of ever-changing weather, of storms gathering and of sun breaking through clouds. The entire production is a swirl of meaningful motion in which nothing feels tacked on for effect. Tolstoy's critique of Napoleon comes to life in a single image: the Emperor is last seen rushing through the snow in a motley crowd, his role in the drama reduced to a walk-on part.

Valery Gergiev was the conductor, winning another battle in his worldwide campaign to install Prokofiev in the front rank of opera composers. He brought with him scores of fine Russian singers from the Maryinsky, many of whom were making their Met débuts. The most important was Anna Netrebko, a young lyric soprano with a pearly, gleaming tone, who projected her voice effortlessly into the house. She embodied the role of Natasha so sparklingly that it was impossible to imagine anyone else singing it. Her partner in glamour was Dmitri Hvorostovsky, as Andrei; his silver hair and golden baritone have long been admired, but his acting has taken on new gravitas in recent years. As he staggered out of his deathbed to dance a final waltz with Natasha, I doubt that I was the only one on the brink of tears.

The cast was huge—sixty-eight roles in all—and I can list only some favorites. Gegam Grigorian made good use of his rugged tenor in the role of Pierre Bezukhov; he caught Pierre's nobility and kindness and also his disorientation and rage. Elena Obraztsova personified the old aristocracy in a few room-shaking mezzo tones. Ekaterina Semenchuk sang gorgeously as Natasha's cousin Sonya. Victoria Livengood found an edgy expressiveness in the awful Hélène Bezukhova. Oleg Balashov, a robust-voiced tenor, gave a charming veneer to the equally awful Kuragin. Vladimir Ognovenko commanded the room for a minute or two as the impossible old Prince Bolkonsky. Samuel Ramey, as Kutuzov, sounded underpowered on the wide-open stage, but he exuded a wise old fighter's dignity. Nikolai Gassiev delivered a vibrant sketch of Platon Karatayev, the ultimate Tolstoy peasant. And Vassily Gerello made a powerful caricature out of Napoleon. (Be forewarned: one or two sections of the opera feel as long as this paragraph.)



Anna Netrebko as Natasha at a St. Petersburg ball. Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

Gergiev, who made his American début with "War and Peace," in 1991, in San Francisco, showed an unerring grasp of the architecture of the score. Those who think of him as a brutish conductor should listen to his delicate shaping of the lyric scenes, particularly Andrei's death. The Met orchestra played as if it had lived with the music for years. The chorus sang lustily and acted with commitment. Even the extras had an air of dire purpose; there was none of the usual half-hearted milling around.

I did not witness the production's notorious opening-night mishap, in which one of the extras tumbled into the orchestra. If, as the Met administration darkly hinted, this was a bid to cause mischief or attract attention, it succeeded; for a day or two, the episode seemed to get more space in the *Times* than Enron. A friend suggested that the Met should respond by hiring an overacting warden. On the second night, there were no signs of impending catastrophe, and the only story worth reporting was that the Met had brought about a marvel of opera staging. ♦

ON TELEVISION

KING OF KINGS

Bernie Mac rules the roost.

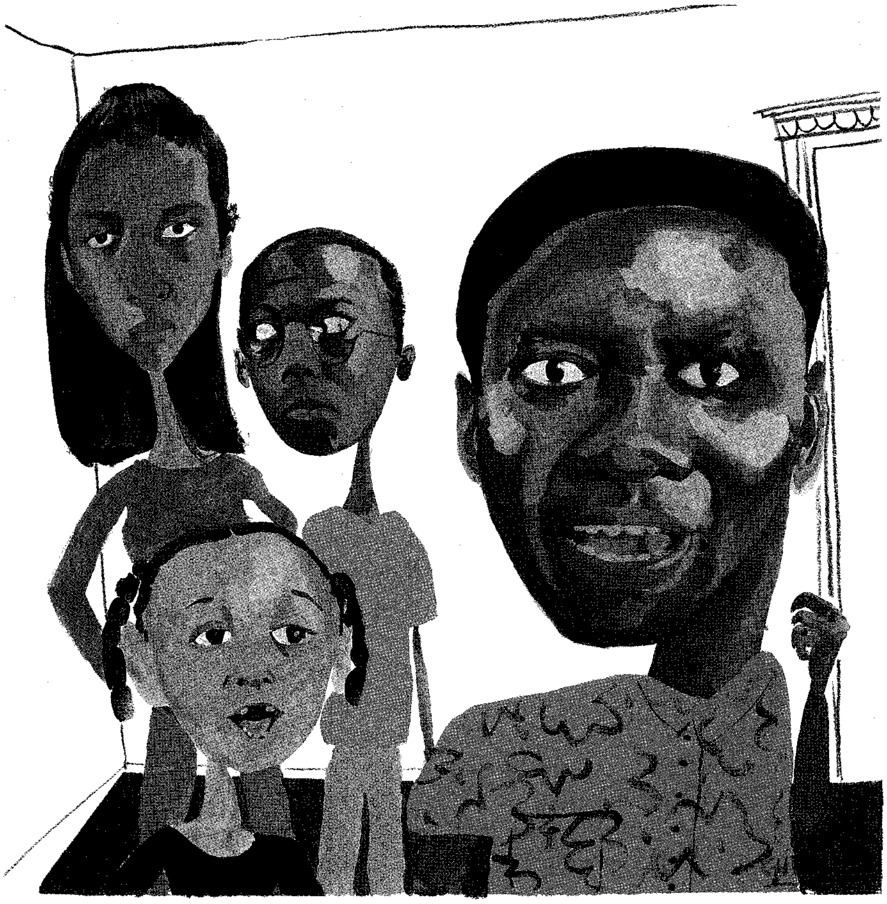
BY NANCY FRANKLIN

In one of the offstage scenes in "The Original Kings of Comedy," the 2000 concert film directed by Spike Lee that showcases four black standup performers, Bernie Mac is hanging around a basketball court with his fellow-comedians when he says to the camera, as if he had a bone to pick with it, "Do I have a television show? No. . . . 'Cause you scared of me. Scared I'm gonna say something." Then he pulls back from his mock-aggressive stance. "White folks, I don't mean it. I'm just playin'," he says plaintively. "If you give me a chance, I'll take WB, I'll take UPN, I'll take USA. Give me a chance to show you." He was acknowledging a couple of realities: that the four major networks are largely uninterested in building shows around black performers these days (in 1999, the N.A.A.C.P. issued a highly publicized criticism of the four majors for their lack of diversity in front of, behind, and all around the camera), and that the other kings of comedy with whom he was sharing the stage on a very successful national tour—Steve Harvey, Cedric the Entertainer, and D. L. Hughley—had their own shows. "The Steve Harvey Show," which co-stars Cedric the Entertainer, just ended an almost six-year run on the WB but airs in syndication on UPN with "I Love Lucy"-like frequency, and D. L. Hughley has "The Hughleys," also on UPN.

Bernie Mac's intensity and outrageousness—he styles himself as someone who says not just what the rest of us don't say but also what we *can't* say, out of propriety or political correctness—might seem to make him an unlikely prospect for network television, but someone heard his plea, and "The Bernie Mac Show," a triumph of half-hour comedy, débuted on Fox in November. The surprise is how well and how fully he has transferred his standup persona to the small screen; you may not be hearing his riff on the word "motherfucker" on the show, but the character he plays is recognizably the same. He has adjusted it without denaturing it—if anything, he has made it richer. The intensity is still there, in his declamatory voice and his mercurial physical presence—even sitting down, he bobs and weaves and postures like a boxer—and he seems made for TV in the best sense, which is to say that you can't take your eyes off him.

In the sitcom, he plays a successful comedian in his mid-forties named Bernie Mac, who lives in a big house in Los Angeles and is married to Wanda (Kellita Smith), an A.T. & T. executive. (The quasi-autobiographical setup is analogous to that of another recent triumph of half-hour comedy, "Curb Your Enthusiasm," in which Larry David, the comedy writer and co-creator of "Seinfeld," plays Larry David, the comedy writer and co-creator of "Seinfeld.") Bernie's sister back in Chicago, we find out in the first episode, is a drug addict and has been ordered into rehab by the court, and Bernie has to take in her three children: Bryana (Dee Dee Davis), a sweet-faced five-year-old; Jordan (Jeremy Suarez), a gawky, glasses-wearing, pre-asthmatic eight-year-old; and Vanessa (Camille Winbush), a hard-to-read, often stubborn thirteen-year-old who knows exactly how to pull Bernie's chain.

Bernie and Wanda, who have no children of their own, now have to get on the parenthood highway from a dead halt, but Bernie doesn't hesitate. The kids are family, and that's all there is to it. (Their father, mentioned only in passing in the first episode and not at all since then, is in jail.) Like everyone who doesn't have children, Bernie has strong opinions about how they should be brought up. (In real life, Bernie Mac and his wife have a grown daughter, and they helped raise a teen-age niece and her daughter.) Much of the show's humor, it probably goes without saying, comes from the variety of messes and misunderstandings that fill the large



Three children and a big baby: Adventures in parenting on "The Bernie Mac Show."

R. GREGORY CHRISTIE

space between Uncle Bernie's code of behavior—a code whose aim is to insure that his pleasures and routines aren't disrupted—and the children's ability or willingness to live up to it. Bernie is full of hot air and bluster (he operates in the big-baby tradition of Ralph Kramden and Archie Bunker), but part of his charm is that he is a genuine hero and yet doesn't see himself as one. He's never ambivalent about doing what has to be done, and he's never ambivalent about how much of a pain in the neck that can be. Bernie is perpetually aggrieved, embattled, beleaguered. Taking the kids around the house when they first arrive, he tells them not to touch his stuff: "*Mi casa es mi casa*," he says. One morning, when the kids are bored and Wanda suggests that he schedule something for them to do, he growls, "I did schedule something. Ten o'clock: leave me alone. Eleven o'clock: leave me alone. Twelve o'clock: make my lunch, and leave me alone." When Vanessa complains that "it's like a prison in here," after he yells at the kids for throwing water balloons in the bathroom, he says, "You think it's like a prison, huh? Well, I got news for you. It ain't. Because in prison there's hope."

At the beginning of every episode, and periodically throughout the show, Bernie sits in a big Mission-style chair in his den—his throne room—and talks to the viewers, explaining his side of things, sharing his philosophy of parenting, and insisting on his right to be Mr. Bernie Mac. This device—TV characters talking to the audience—has become common, and it's often used (as it is in another popular Fox show about spillage, breakage, chaos, and discipline, "Malcolm in the Middle") by adolescents, who, powerless in their own homes, need to complain to an understanding ear about the conditions they're living under. But Bernie Mac isn't looking to win over just one person—he wants the whole country's sympathy. "America, was I so wrong? Was I so wrong?" he asks, after he's been a guest on a radio show and admitted, when pressed, that if he had a free pass he'd use it with Halle Berry. In the first episode, Bernie, while sitting in his den, borrows a line from Bernie Mac's standup routine: he talks about busting Vanessa's head "till the white meat shows." This line caught a lot of people's attention, but the show at least makes Bernie sound like an idiot when he says it. He adds, "That's right, I said it. And I ain't ashamed that I said it, and ain't nobody gonna make me take it back," and then he shakes his head and sits back hard in the chair, like a child who believes he has been unfairly chastised. In a later episode, he uses the line with some mothers who have brought their children to his house for a play date, and here it's confusingly funny—funny because the women, whom Bernie has so impressed with his decorating and housekeeping and cooking skills that they're now hanging on his every word, think it's hilarious and burst into uninhibited laughter, and confusing because they're all white, presumably liberal, and upper middle class, and you're not sure whether on some level a comment is being made about racial and class hypocrisy or whether the point is that some aspects of parenthood cut across all societal lines.

Bernie is avowedly old school when it comes to children's place in the hierarchy of authority. He's contemptuous of his own father's "nonconfrontational" approach, and equates it with irresponsibility. Kids, he says, are "too sassy, too grown today—they talk back too much." After a tug-of-war with Vanessa, he sits in his chair and does a little dance to celebrate being the "lead dog" again—it's only an illusion, of course, which is why it's so funny. In "The Original Kings of Comedy," Bernie Mac talks about "Big Momma," the iconic grandmother figure who wore an old flowered dress and had "swollen-ass ankles." When she talked, you listened. Or so grownups like to remember it, though it's pretty clear that Bernie didn't listen (the real Bernie Mac's ninth-grade English teacher recently wrote a piece for the Chicago *Tribune* testifying to same). But Uncle Bernie doesn't really throw his weight around—he uses it to protect the children and to make them feel loved. The show doesn't dwell on the kids' situation, but its seriousness and sadness are palpable beneath the comedy (there's no laugh track, which adds to the show's credibility), and the kids often get the last word. "Why didn't you stop me, America? You know I don't know what I'm doing. I'm new at this," Bernie implores us after one of his many missteps. He's learning as he goes, and, like the best parents, he's not afraid to admit it. When it comes to child-rearing, you could do a lot worse than to ask yourself, "What would Bernie Mac do?" ♦

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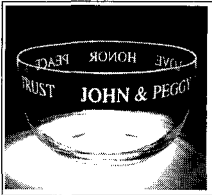

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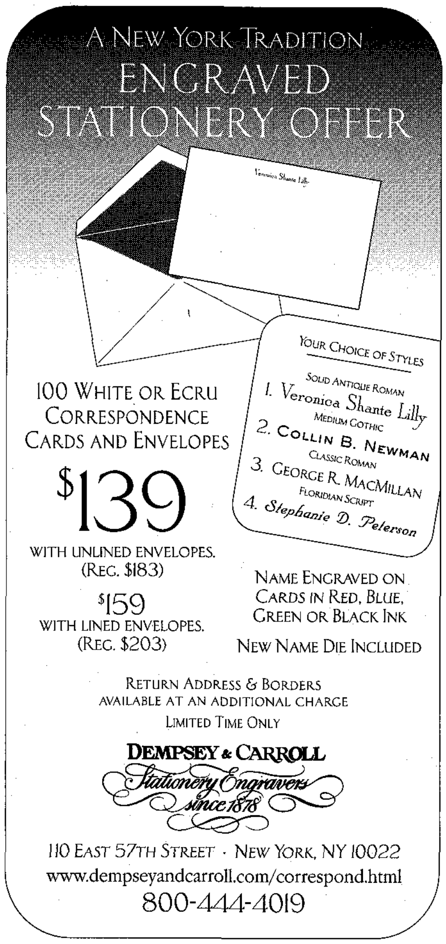

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

CALCULATING RHYTHM

"John Q." and "Crossroads."

BY DAVID DENBY

Melodrama has often served as a vehicle for social protest in American movies, but "John Q.," which attacks the inequality of health care in this country, falls below even minimal standards of dramatic decency. "John Q." is a trashy, opportunistic piece of pop demagoguery. It justifies hostage-taking, and lays out its characters in opposing stereotypes for easy audience identification. It hectors us, shames us, and plucks our heartstrings with a ham fist (if you think that's physically impossible, wait until you see the end of the movie, which could reduce Slobodan Milosevic to tears). And yet, as awful as "John Q." is, the picture does touch a nerve. The audience is alive to it: on opening day in a Times Square multiplex, people were shouting back at the screen, and a quarrel broke out in the theatre between men with different views of the movie. There's a lot of pent-up anger about the way the health-care system works, and "John Q." plugs into that anger like a drill working the Alaskan subsoil. The movie appears to be turning into a hit, and the consequences could be interesting. Right-wing populist movies—usually in the form of vigilante fantasies, like "Collateral Damage"—open every year, but a left-wing populist movie has become a rarity. There was "Erin Brockovich," but that movie was an attack on a single corporation. This one is an attack on the entire H.M.O.-insurance-company complex, which, the movie suggests, screws the ethnic working poor. The movie quivers with righteous tears.

The hero, whose name is John Q. Archibald, is played by Denzel Washington as an ordinary working stiff, a Chicago machinist caught in an economic downturn and always short of cash. John's job has been cut back to twenty hours a week, and the factory's management has switched medical plans to an H.M.O. When John's little boy—an eager charmer—collapses on the ball field while trying to reach second base, the system creates a disaster. The boy has an enlarged heart; he needs a new ticker or he'll die. But, at the hospital, John is turned down by the condescending chief administrator (Anne Heche) and the ace cardiac surgeon (James Woods): his insurance won't cover a heart transplant; he'll have to pay the two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar fee himself. Desperate, he grabs the surgeon and locks him and a bunch of patients in the emergency room, threatening to kill them if his son doesn't get a new heart.

I don't suppose the services of a moral philosopher are required to point out that shutting down an emergency room in a city like Chicago may not be the most effective way to win support for your cause. Yet, in "John Q.," crowds assemble outside the hospital and cheer for the nut-brain hostage-taker. A good cop (Robert Duvall) tries to persuade John Q. to give up, and a bad one (Ray Liotta) tries to kill him, and John Q. becomes a folk hero of sorts. The movie borrows heavily from other hostage films, particularly from Sidney Lumet's 1975 classic, "Dog Day Afternoon," in which a crazy situation came to make a beautiful kind of sense. With "John Q.," it's not just the situation that's crazy, it's the movie itself. In a prologue, a young white woman driving a BMW gets killed in a highway accident. Before she's smooshed by a truck, we see a cross hanging from her rearview mirror, and we hear "Ave Maria" on the soundtrack.

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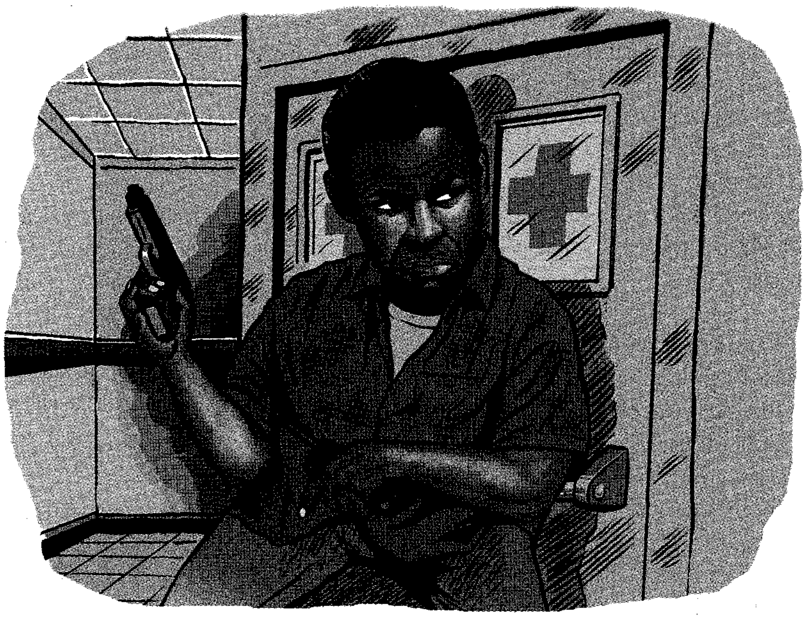
It seems that God himself has intervened in order to provide a fresh heart for the ailing black child. One might have expected the Almighty not to be such a cornball, and, perhaps, to have avoided such loaded devices as sacrificing a wealthy woman to help a poor boy, but there's no accounting for taste.

This is grim, grim stuff, redolent of the silliest Victorian melodrama. I recite the plot only because I suspect something strange is going on. The banality may be intentional. One can't be sure, but the screenwriter, James Kearns, and the director, Nick Cassavetes, may be consciously working below their talents. The exposition is done in the simplest fashion, as in a young-adult novel. The filmmakers set up a hospital emergency room filled with nothing but types—a hapless security guard, a whore with low self-esteem, a sleaze who gets his comeuppance—and induce the major actors to embarrass themselves. Denzel Washington shows up paunchy, and he frowns and purses his lips and slows his normal tempo way down. His John Q. is an emotional, gullible, and confused man. Anne Heche, who seemed on the verge of becoming a great actress a few years ago, talks in a tight, nasty little voice. The entire movie smacks of sincere political commitment holding itself and its audience cheap. My guess is that "John Q." has been pitched low in order to rouse an audience that the filmmakers view as somnolent. Many Americans, they may have reasoned, are too easily distracted by patriotic symbols and by right-wing attacks on "élitists" (e.g., Hillary Clinton, who is treated as a heroine here). These people don't vote according to their own interests; therefore we have to reach them at gut level.

I find it both curious and terrifying that liberal filmmakers would consider intelligence itself a political liability. It's admittedly easier to win audiences over with a crusade against toxic drinking water than it is with an attack on the intricacies of health-care administration, but surely the filmmakers could have adapted the "Erin Brockovich" model and made a strong, shrewd piece of fiction about the terrible trouble that families with inadequate medical insurance find themselves in. When good-hearted Hollywood people aim low, they fall into an impossible contradiction between idealism and cynicism, and they corrupt their own best ideas. Yet, at the practical level, Cassavetes and Kearns may be proved right. "John Q." is certainly not a simple dud like, say, Bruce Willis's new movie, "Hart's War," which is about racism in the Army during the Second World War—hardly a pressing issue—and never comes up to speed. Given the way that audiences are responding, "John Q." might even become a political phenomenon. What would right-wing populist talk-show hosts do if their listeners turned out to love this appeal for universal health care? Right now, "John Q." is a distinctly bad joke, but the joke could become a flagrant provocation.

MARK ZINGARELLI



Denzel Washington plays a factory worker with inadequate health insurance.

Continued report from the theatres: the kids at a late-night showing of Britney Spears's début movie, "Crossroads," were groaning at what a sweet nothing the picture was. The laughter was good-natured enough. They weren't offended, and neither was I: the movie would first have to exist on the screen for anyone to be offended by it. "Crossroads," which was written by Shonda Rhimes and directed by Tamra Davis, is built around Britney's song "I'm Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman," and it's about her passage to adulthood in the summer after she graduates high school. What it's really about, of course, is the very delicate marketing problem of turning a super-bland pop star into an acceptable human being onscreen, and its solution is so coy and hedged that the movie seems almost to be making the audience complicit in its calculations for success: we will show Britney dancing on her bed in the scantiest of undies but also make her the class valedictorian and a virgin; we will show her longing for freedom and escaping from her small town with a couple of friends but also have her phone home at every pit stop between Georgia and Los Angeles; we will show her attracted to a young man with sexy stubble (Anson Mount) and allow the thrilling impression that he has killed someone, but make him in the end a knightly fellow who rescues women from their troubles. And so on, right to the last shot. Do they succeed? Will Britney Spears become a movie star? Maybe, but, without putting too fine a point on it, there's something wrong with her face. In closeup, her eyes appear too widely spaced and her upper lip too soft, and her flesh seems made of a lab-developed polymer that has been lacquered a golden hue, like Peking duck. When she's not singing or dancing, the camera finds Britney shockingly indistinct and ordinary—young without the recklessness of youth, successful without the brazenness of power. She's as doll-like as Barbie's kid sister. To commit herself to any particular personality trait—to *have* a personality—would be to limit her appeal in some way. So she doesn't, or can't, and there's nothing to do but wonder at the absence at the center of the screen. ♦

THE BACK PAGE BY PAUL SLANSKY

THE FOURTH HUNDRED DAYS: THE QUIZ

1. Aides to Attorney General John Ashcroft offered as proof of his sense of humor his propensity to lighten the mood at tense meetings with his imitation of which character from "The Simpsons"?

(a) Homer.
(b) Ned Flanders.
(c) Mr. Burns.
(d) Apu.

2. True or false: White House spokesman Ari Fleischer insisted that his statement that he wasn't aware of "anybody in the White House" discussing Enron's financial situation was technically accurate because, although it turned out that both the Treasury Secretary and the Commerce Secretary had discussed the company's collapse with its chairman, Kenneth Lay, neither of them actually worked in the White House.

3. Which Enron-related whopper did George W. Bush tell?

(a) He claimed that Kenneth Lay "was a supporter of Ann Richards" in the 1994 Texas gubernatorial race, although Lay gave a great deal more money to Bush and even endorsed him.

(b) He implied that Lay was a Richards-administration holdover whom he first "got to know" after being elected governor, although the two had worked together on the 1992 Republican Convention.

(c) He expressed outrage that his own mother-in-law bought eight thousand dollars' worth of Enron stock "last summer," when she actually purchased it in 1999.

(d) All of the above.

Who said what?

4. "In Afghanistan, people who are friendly [to the United States] and unfriendly are constantly meeting together. Indeed, sometimes the same people can be friendly and later unfriendly within a relatively short period of time. There are also people who can pretend they're friendly and who, in fact, are not very friendly."

5. "Make [John Walker Lindh] leave his hair the way it is and his face as dirty as it is and let him go wandering around this country and see what kind of sympathy he would get."

6. "To those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberty, my message is this: Your tactics only aid terrorists."

7. "If we find somebody who wants to harm America, who espouses the philosophy that's terrorist and bent, I can assure you we will bring that person to justice."

8. "Given the president's own definition of the monumental goals in September, it is way too soon for Karl Rove to be dancing in the end zone."

(a) John Ashcroft.
(b) Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.
(c) New York *Times* columnist Maureen Dowd.
(d) George W. Bush.
(e) George H. W. Bush.

9. In reference to the press coverage of the Enron scandal, who said, "They act like there's some billing records or some cattle scam or some fired travel aides or some blue dress"?

(a) White House aide Karen Hughes.
(b) White House aide Mary Matalin.
(c) The White House chief of staff, Andrew Card.
(d) The Republican National Committee chairman, Marc Racicot.

10. True or false: White House spokesman Ari Fleischer defended the Administration's refusal to release records of Vice-President Dick Cheney's energy-task-force meetings by saying, "You know, the very document that protects our liberties more than anything else, the Constitution, was, of course, drafted in total secrecy."

Match the item with the number.

11. Clemencies—out of almost nine hundred requested—granted by George W. Bush in 2001.

12. Dogs that saw George W. Bush faint, tumble off his couch, and bruise his face after eating a pretzel.

13. Dollars that an Enron share was worth when trading in the stock was suspended.

14. Dollars spent by the Justice Department on heavy blue drapes to hide the bare-breasted statue, there since 1936, that John Ashcroft hated to be photographed under.

(a) Zero.
(b) .67.
(c) Two.
(d) 8,650.

15. How did Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill dismiss the Enron collapse?

(a) "You've seen one biggest corporate bankruptcy in history, you've seen them all."

(b) "Companies come and go. It's part of the genius of capitalism."

(c) "In a year or two, we'll be laughing at this."

(d) "Enron, Shmenron."

16. What did George W. Bush say when he was asked by a reporter whether the war had changed him?

(a) "Not over my dead body."

(b) "It pretty much lets me do whatever I want as long as I say it's against terrorism."

(c) "I don't know. I don't spend a lot of time looking in the mirror. Except when I comb my hair."

(d) "It sure probably made me say the word 'evil' a lot more than I would have otherwise."

Answers:
(1) c, (2) True, (3) d, (4) b, (5) e, (6) a, (7) d, (8) c, (9) b, (10) True, (11) a, (12) c, (13) b, (14) d, (15) b, (16) c.

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